GUJARAT: CHALLENGES FOR THE NEW CM

RAJASTHAN: TRENDSETTING LEOPARD SAFARI

DEFENCE: MAKE IN INDIA YET TO TAKE OFF

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INDIA TODAY

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NATIONAL ASSET MONETISATION PLAN

THE BIG PRIVATISATION PUSH

HOW IT WILL WORK

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FROM THE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

At the beginning of the Modi government's first term, two catchphrases held out a lot of promise. They were 'Minimum government, maximum governance' and the 'government has no business being in business'. This was music to my ears. For too long, the Indian state had been occupying the 'commanding heights' of the economy. Some were not even that commanding, such as hotels and airlines. Most of them were inefficient and a drain on the exchequer. Sadly, the Opposition jibe of '*suit-boot ki sarkar*' in the first term put paid to those slogans, although the government did bring in much-needed reform like the Goods & Services Tax (GST) and the Insolvency & Bankruptcy Code (IBC). It was heartening to hear the prime minister declare on February 24 this year at an event organised by the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management, "When the government monetises a particular asset, it is replaced by the private sector of the country. The private sector brings in investment as well as best global practices. It brings in top-quality manpower and transforms the management. It rapidly expands that sector and creates new job opportunities." The prime minister focused on public-private partnerships, and this year's Union budget mentioned disinvestment. The ruling establishment freely uses the words 'monetisation' and 'disinvestment' today, which would have been anathema earlier. Ideology aside, there is good reason for the government's push in this direction.

INDIA TODAY
A BOLD NEW DEAL

February 15, 2021

The Indian economy continues to remain in the ICU for a second successive year. It contracted by 7.3 per cent in the previous financial year, the first full-year contraction since 1979-80, when the GDP shrank by 5.2 per cent. This April, a deadly second wave of the Covid-19 pandemic stamped out the faint glimmer of hope when the economy grew at 1.6 per cent in the fourth quarter. The economy expanded at its fastest ever in the first quarter of FY2022—20.15 per cent, but this was because of the low base the previous year.

This financial crisis has now seen the government resort to extraordinary measures like asset monetisation, as part of which it will lease out its assets to the private sector to raise resources. On August 23, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP), for which the government has identified 13 sectors across 12 ministries and departments and comprising 20 asset classes. The private sector can collect tolls on roads, operate trains on government-built tracks, run railway stations, collect revenue from power generation and transmission lines, manage warehouses, telecom towers and operate airports. The government plans to raise Rs 6 lakh crore from leasing out this infrastructure over the next four years. The big earners, it hopes, will be roads (Rs 1.6 lakh crore), railways (Rs 1.52 lakh crore), power transmission (Rs 45,200 crore) and power generation (Rs 39,832 crore).

The government will use some of this revenue for ambitious schemes, such as the Rs 111 lakh crore National Infrastructure Pipeline to upgrade infrastructure and build multimodal connectivity in the next five years. It also needs to fund radical social schemes like the Rs 3.6 lakh crore Jal Jeevan Mission to provide piped water supply to every village home by 2024.

Asset monetisation is a laudable idea, but, as we have seen in the past, it is not slogans and ideas that are in short supply; the failure is in the implementation. The government's record on delivering on its slogans has been a mixed bag so far. In 2020-21, the government garnered just one-tenth of its planned disinvestment target of Rs 2.1 lakh crore. This is at a time of buoyant stock markets. Gangrenous PSUs like Air India—with accumulated losses of Rs 70,820 crore (as of March 31, 2020)—remain unsold. Other unrealised PSU sales, such as those of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL), Container Corporation of India, two public sector banks and one general insurance company, testify to the yawning gap between intent and implementation. Delays can be costly too. Since the government approved the privatisation of Air India in 2017, the losses have increased by Rs 27,520 crore.

The government should be clear about its motives for this drive. Is it being done because it is short of funds, or do they genuinely believe it is in the country's best interest? The answer will determine how hard they are willing to push an inert bureaucracy whose primary instinct is to preserve the status quo, more so in this case, because they stand to lose power over a large segment of their domain. The devil lies in the fine print. They can make the conditions for monetisation so stringent that it is not attractive for anyone to bid. In addition to raising revenues, there has to be a fundamental belief on the government's part that the resources being privatised will be used more efficiently and that the nation will gain. There will, of course, be controversies over how the assets are valued. The Opposition will also accuse the government of selling the family silver and creating oligarchies. The government will have to weather all opposition and convincingly communicate the narrative that it is to the benefit of the consumer and the country.

Our cover story, 'The Big Privatisation Push', written by Executive Editor M.G. Arun and Deputy Editor Shwweta Punj, examines the government's asset monetisation policy and how it will work.

There are enough examples in recent history to show that when government-controlled companies dominate the economy, they are generally the kiss of death. A hardline Communist country like China had to open its economy to private enterprise for it to grow. Since taking that step in 1978, the GDP grew at an average of 10 per cent annually. It lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty. In 1978, the per capita income of China was $156.4 and India's $205.6. In 2020, India's per capita income was $1,900 and China's $10,500. The great architect of China's reform, Deng Xiaoping, famously said: "It doesn't matter whether a cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice."

The prime minister, too, should not worry about what colour his critics will call his cat. Instead, he must proceed with determination on this much-needed reform and release the Indian economy from the last vestiges of our disastrous socialist era.

(Aroon Purie)

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Photo illustration by NILANJAN DAS; *Digital imaging by* AMARJEET SINGH NAGI

COVER STORY

THE BIG PRIVATISATION PUSH

The Modi government hopes to raise Rs 6 lakh crore over the next four years by monetising public sector assets—how it will work

Cover by **NILANJAN DAS**

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PM Narendra Modi was speaking in Lok Sabha

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With reference to the advertorial for The Life Insurance Corporation of India published in the **India Today English issue dated September 13, 2021,** under the title 'LIC: The Institution', the size of LIC's AUM should be read as Rs 38,04,610.01 crore and not Rs 38,04,610.01.

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THE BIG STORY

Why PM Modi and Amit Shah are silent on caste census *by Anilesh S. Mahajan*

A wide section in the BJP favours a caste census but the party's top leadership is weighing its options

https://bit.ly/3hBRl5w

GROUND REPORT

Why a Catholic bishop's remarks on 'love and narcotics jihad' worries Pinarayi Vijayan

by Jeemon Jacob

Joseph Kallarangattu's comments have stirred the communal pot in Kerala, giving the BJP an opportunity

https://bit.ly/3hxqkA8

FROM THE STATES: RAJASTHAN

Why a viral sex video is the Rajasthan police's new headache *by Rohit Parihar*

A string of incidents of corruption and moral turpitude has the state police on the backfoot

https://bit.ly/3CgD3PD

SPOTLIGHT: HURRIYAT

Why Masarat Alam is Kashmir's new hawk

by Moazum Mohammad

The new Hurriyat Conference chief is a hardliner like the late S.A.S. Geelani but being in jail, his appointment is merely symbolic

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ENTERTAINMENT: OTT

How Lionsgate Play is betting big on India

by Suhani Singh

It has a big slate of releases in the next 12 months, premiering 50-60 international titles

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UNPARALLELED UTTAR PRADESH FOUR AND HALF YEARS OF YOGI RAJ

TRACE, TEST, TREAT AND VACCINATION CURBED THE COVID WAVE IN UP

YOGI'S CRUSADE AGAINST COVID-19 SAVES EVERY CHILD

LIFE IS SAFE IN YOGI GOVERNMENT, MAFIA CRIMINALS BEHIND BARS

DOUBLE ENGINE GOVERNMENT EFFECT, HOME, ELECTRICITY, WATER TO HOMELESS

UTTAR PRADESH'S FARMERS BECAME PROSPEROUS

TRACE, TEST, TREAT AND VACCINATION CURBED THE COVID WAVE IN UP

To make the fight against Covid more systematic, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath adopted the policy of Trace - Test -Treat for decentralization of the system.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath established an integrated covid command and control centre in every district of state to fight the corona wave.

Over 400 testing labs are working for the covid testing. Out of these 258 are Government and 132 labs are run by the private sector. A record number of more than 7.5 crore tests have been conducted in the state.

Despite being the state with highest population in the country, Uttar Pradesh has left behind all other states by conducting on an average 1.50 lakh RT-PCR covid tests daily.

UP model of micromanagement proved effective against covid. Districts were divided into sectors and then incharge magistrates were appointed for every sector.

With the help of four lakh members of over 73000 surveillance committees and over 8800 skilled rapid response teams the decisive effort was made to break the chain of covid-19.

Around 1 lakh 80 thousand beds of L1, L2 and L3 categories were arranged in state for treatment of covid-19 patients.

NITI Aayog has appreciated the Yogi government's Triple T (Trace, Test and Treat) campaign to trace corona patients, isolate them at home to prevent the spread of infection along with the Oxygen Transport Tracking System.

TRACE, TEST, TREAT AND VACCINATION CURBED THE COVID WAVE IN UP

> **The biggest example of the changing work culture of Uttar Pradesh under the leadership of Yogi Adityanath is 'sab ko vaccine, muft vaccine' campaign. The state has administered more than 8 crore vaccines and also carries the record of the highest number of vaccination in a single day in the country.**
>
> ***— Narendra Modi Prime Minister***

18,181 beds were arranged in **25** government and **33** private medical colleges, medical universities and institutions.

97 sugar Mills and other units of a state produced around **3** crore lliter sanitizer during the second wave of covid.

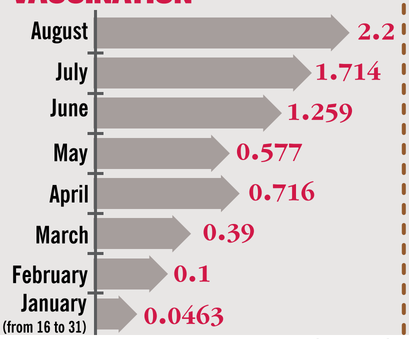
86700 persons in rural areas and **82000** employees in urban areas are working in the sanitization campaign. The Chief Minister himself monitored this campaign.

Likewise during the first wave of covid-19 in the second wave also migrants and daily passengers were transported to their destination through more than **10** thousand buses of the Transport Corporation.

After directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, the Ayush department of state approached **23** lakh people during covid period. Free of cost Ayush kit was distributed to around **20** lakh people by the department.

Yogi government is working for one district-one medical College. At least one medical college is functional in **59** districts of the state and it has been decided that medical colleges on PPP model will be constructed in those **16** districts, where not a single medical College is available. Construction of Atal Bihari Bajpayee Medical University started in Lucknow.

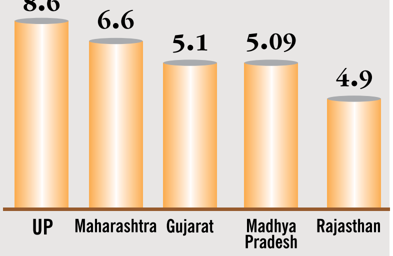
CONTINUOUSLY INCREASING VACCINATION



Total vaccination (in crores)

NUMERO UNO UP

Total inoculation (in crores)



31% increase in the speed of inoculation within 30 days was registered in Uttar Pradesh

Figures till 11 September

YOGI'S CRUSADE AGAINST COVID-19 SAVES EVERY CHILD

BAL SEVA: Chief Minister yogi adityanath started Bal Seva yojana for the children who have lost both or one of their parents due to Covid since the starting of the pandemic in March 2020. Currently more than **4000** children are directly being benefited from Mukhyamantri Bal Seva Yojana in Uttar Pradesh.

PICU PROJECT: The (pediatric intensive care unit) PICU project, which played an important role during control of encephalitis, is now implemented across the state to save the children from covid. All medical colleges of the state have been directed to prepare **100** bedded ICU for children.

ICU FACILITY: The Chief Minister has asked to set up **100** bedded ICU at every division level and **25** bedded ICU at district hospitals. Medical kits are being distributed among children to save them from a possible third wave of Covid.

GENOME SEQUENCING: Genome testing facility has been provided by the government for testing of covid delta variants in BHU, KGMU, CDRI and Ram Manohar Lohia institute Lucknow. Very soon the genome sequencing facility will start in the National botanical Research institute also.

FOCUS ON TESTING: More than **70%** of the total covid testing of the state is being conducted in villages. The screening teams have reached to **97941** villages of **75** districts of Uttar Pradesh. The health screening of **18** crore people has been completed and **8124** rapid response teams are deployed in villages.

LIFE SUPPORT AMBULANCE: Teams comprising more than **23** thousand Emergency medical technicians and pilots are working **24/7** in **108, 102** and advanced life support ambulances to fight with the probable third wave of Corona.

PSA PLANT: DRDO and NHAI will jointly establish **127** pressure swing aspersions (PSA) oxygen plants in all districts of Uttar Pradesh. These plants will provide **5650** litre oxygen per minute to **6225** beds of the hospitals.

OXYGEN PLANT: Before the covid pandemic there were **25** oxygen plants in the state. Now the number has been increased

> **“The Uttar Pradesh government is creating micro containment zones on the principle of jahan bimar vahan upchar (where there is a patient, there should be treatment) and distributing medicines in villages and rural areas. IT is a very good step.**
>
> *— Narendra Modi Prime Minister*

to **555**. Out of these **409** plants are ready now and the availability currently is of **1000** metric ton oxygen which is way ahead of the demand in the state.

HEALTH ATM: Health ATMs will be established in villages, small towns and urban areas in order to provide better health facilities to the citizens of the state. In these ATM's health of the people will be tested on different parameters with the help of high tech machines.

GOLDEN CARD: Golden cards will be made available to all antyodaya card holders under Ayushman Bharat scheme. Treatment of kidney transplant, corneal transplant and mucormycosis black fungus will be included in the package under the scheme.

CLEAN DRINKING WATER: To provide clean drinking water to the citizens of the state Yogi government has repaired **629** water pumps out of **11589** water pumps in all municipal corporations. While **71** hand pumps out of **428** have been rebored and made functional.

FOCUS ON NUTRITION: CM Yogi launched National Nutrition month 2021. For improvement of the health of malnourished children under the age of five in the state, a special campaign is being launched from 1st July to 30th September by the department of integrated child development services ICDS.

DISASTER EXPERTS: The Yogi government has decided to appoint disaster experts on contract basis in **62** districts of state to deal with any kind of disaster. They will get a remuneration of **50,000** rupees per month. All those experts who were working in **13** districts of state have been given an extension of one year service.

HI TECH VILLAGE HOSPITALS: **3022** primary Health centres PHC and **855** community Health centres CHC of state are getting high tech facilities. Along with providing new equipment to the pathology and radiology departments, the government is also resolving the problem of doctor and paramedical staff.

YOGI'S CRUSADE AGAINST COVID-19 SAVES EVERY CHILD

LIFE IS SAFE IN YOGI GOVERNMENT, MAFIA CRIMINALS BEHIND BARS

Appointment of ADG (additional director general) rank officers in police zones and IG (inspector general) rank officers in the police ranges started by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath after coming to power.

In the last 4 and half years, over **150** criminals have been killed during encounters while more than **3400** got injured. **44759** accused were arrested under gangster act and **630** accused were put behind bars under national security act.

Police has identified **1800** active criminal Mafia at district level and strict action has been taken against them so that the law and order situation should be maintained at district level also.

History sheet of **382** criminal Mafia active in state was opened and **274** accused were sent to Jail after arrests. More than **300** arms licences have also been cancelled.

As per the revenue department records, around **624 3.89** hectare (**1,542,49** acres) land which means more than **624** square kilometre land has been released from the clutches of land mafia between 2017 to 15 August 2021.

While identifying **2464** land encroachers, the revenue department has sent 187 land mafia to jail and **4407** FIRs have been lodged by registering **22,992** revenue and **857** civil suits.

Property of **41** land mafias have been attached in state while action has been taken against **2** under national security act, **170** under Gangster act and against **399** accused under Goondas act.

A video wall has been mounted with **12** TV screens at the command centre in jail headquarters at Lucknow. This video wall further splits into **48** screens.

All jails are online now in Uttar Pradesh and a total of **2750** cameras have been installed in the jails of the entire state. The live feed of these CCTV cameras is broadcasted directly on the command centre on the video wall of the command centre.

843 cases have been lodged after identifying **124** mining Mafia in the state and **80** such accused have been arrested. Action against **74** accused was taken under Goondas act.

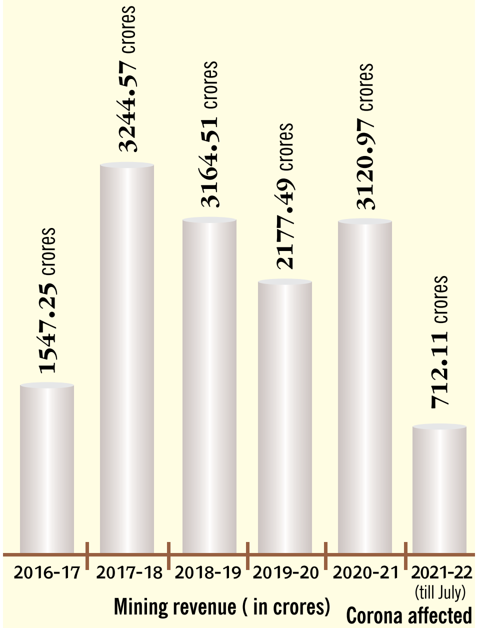
The report of Home Ministry's parliamentary standing committee headed by congress MP Anand Sharma praises the Uttar Pradesh government for dealing with the violence against women.

LIFE IS SAFE IN YOGI GOVERNMENT, MAFIA CRIMINALS BEHIND BARS

YEAR 2020 IN COMPARISON WITH YEAR 2016

- **70.10%** reduction in cases of dacoity
- **69.30%** less cases of loot
- **29.10%** reduction in cases of murder
- **33.00%** less cases of riots
- **100%** reduction in cases of road hold up
- **41.51** percent reduction in cases of kidnapping for ransom
- **11.60%** less cases of murder for dacoity
- **52.00%** percent reduction in cases of rape
- Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has turned the mining sector to the biggest source of income for the government which was earlier synonymous for looting the exchequer during previous regimes. State government has received more than **12000** crores rupees as revenue in the last **4** and a half years.

REVENUE OF MINING INCREASED AFTER ACTION AGAINST MAFIA



मिशन शक्ति
नारी सुरक्षा
नारी सम्मान
नारी स्वावलंबन

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath launched the third phase of 'Mission Shakti' campaign on the eve of Raksha Bandhan on 21st August. On this occasion the foundation stone was laid for 3 women PAC battalions.

First time more than 10,000 women police officers were given posting as police beat officers on the occasion of launching the third phase of 'Mission Shakti'.

Awareness created among more than 8.5 crore men women and others during 'Mission Shakti' campaign and along with it action was also taken against more than 5.25 lakh accused.

While checking 98,55,867 people anti Romeo squad has registered 9948 cases and taken legal action against 14,958 people.

99.6% complaints received at women power lines have been resolved and help was provided to women through 181 women helplines.

Women nodal officers of deputy SP rank have been appointed in every district for quickly resolving the complaints of women and for strict action against the culprits related to women crime.

For delivery of quick justice under POCSO act, 218 new fast track courts are functioning, while 81 magistrate level courts and 81 additional session courts are functional to provide fast justice to women.

Yogi Adityanath government has decided to make 13 cities as safe cities in terms of security to women, which includes Lucknow, Meerut Gorakhpur, Varanasi and Gautam Buddh Nagar also.

DOUBLE ENGINE GOVERNMENT EFFECT, HOME, ELECTRICITY, WATER TO HOMELESS

The duo of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is a true well wisher of poor people. This duo is always eager to continuously solve the problems and concerns of poor, downtrodden and needy people. Prime Minister Narendra Modi conceptualized Pradhanmantri aawas Yojana to provide homes to the poor people and implemented its rural part from 1st April 2016.

This ambitious scheme of the Central Government was launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi from Agra in Uttar Pradesh on 20 November 2016. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has given new heights to this scheme of Prime Minister Modi. On 1st September this year, in a function organised at his government residence Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath gave keys to the beneficiaries of 5.51 lakh houses constructed with an investment of 6637.7 crore rupees under Pradhan mantri awas Yojana and mukhymantri gramin aawas Yojana. In last 4 years around 42 lakh houses were approved under Pradhan mantri awas Yojana and Chief Minister (rural/urban) aawas Yojana gramin while in comparison to that, a total of 53 lakh houses were made in the previous 30 years. This shows that the earlier governments did not pay full attention to resolve the housing problem of the poor. Under the guidance of Prime Minister Modi, Chief minister Yogi Adityanath added the poors, farmers, women, downtrodden, scheduled caste, minorities and people of other categories of the state to the scheme and gave them the benefit. Today poor people are getting benefit of the agenda of development of Chief Minister yogi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi without any discrimination. The beneficiaries of Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and Mukhymantri Awas Yojana (Gramin) are also getting benefit of other beneficial schemes like Ujjwala, saubhagya, Ayushman Bharat, ration card, making of toilet, destitute women pension scheme, old age pension scheme etc.

FULFILLING DREAMS OF POOR FAMILIES

Construction of more than 42 lakh houses under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana

Construction of 1,08,495 houses under Mukhyamantri Awas Yojana Gramin

Free of cost distribution of houses to musahar, vantangiya community and families affected from leprosy.

Infrastructure development at villages of Vantangia community and status of revenue village were given to them

More than 13 lakh cases related to land issues were resolved under varasat campaign.

Implementation of Har Ghar Nal scheme for pure drinking water in 30,000 village panchayats

HITECH TOWNSHIP FOR POOR

बाबा गोकर्णनाथ ग्रामीण आवासीय परिसर
लन्दनपुर ग्रान्ट कुम्भी गोला, खीरी

Magnificent opening gates, beautifully designed houses inside the boundary, shining roads,public parks, streetlights illuminating the premises, gaushala, clean water at door step, power connection to everyone, pollution free gas cylinder to each house, free health facilities to every family and many more... If you link these facilities then the complete picture which comes to mind is a place called 'Londonpur'. And this Londonpur is not a utopian city. This is the 'Baba gokarannath gramin township' developed in the kumbhi block of Lakhimpur khiri district. In Yogi government a model has been developed in Londonpur grant village of Lakhimpur district by giving benefit of 30 other schemes of Central and state governments to the Prime Minister Awas Yojana. Hair township with all facilities has been developed for 26 scheduled caste and land less poor families. Here everything including power to each house, gas connection, park, light, gaushala has been managed by converging 30 schemes of 10 departments. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has directed to implement this unique model in the entire state.

FEATURES OF LONDON PUR GRANT TOWNSHIP

- **Lease of residential land to all families in their village.**
- **No separate grant was taken from government for the township**
- **Free of cost allotment for personal house under PM Awas Yojana gramin**
- **Tap water connection in every house and water supply in houses from water tank.**
- **Power connection in every house and separate transformer also.**
- **26 personal toilets and 26 compost pit**
- **cows made available to everyone under govansh sahbhagita.**
- **Public parks, open gym with help of MANREGA walking track.**
- **Women group under livelihood mission, office and Store**

किसान भाइयों से
संवाद
योगी आदित्यनाथ
मुख्यमंत्री, उत्तर प्रदेश

UTTAR PRADESH'S FARMERS BECAME PROSPEROUS

"Farmers are our food provider and fortune maker of the society….." The Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath believes firmly in this and always stands with the farmers in any situation. The Yogi government is working with full dedication for the conservation of the interests of the farmers. A circular chain is being formed for farmers from their farm to cultivation area and from seeds to market. Many schemes are being implemented in the state for the welfare of farmers and to double their income. Under the Pradhan mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, soil card scheme, Jan dhan scheme the farmers are being connected to the banking system and money is directly being transferred to their accounts through DBT system. Record purchase of food grains was done by the government along with increasing the minimum support price and payment is being done directly into their accounts. In 2016-17 total purchase of wheat was 6 lakh metric ton, while this year despite the covid-19 Pandemic, 56 Lakh metric tons wheat was purchased. In 2016 total paddy purchase was 16 lakh metric ton while in the last 1 year only record purchase of 66 lakh metric ton paddy was done by the State Government.

RECORD PAYMENT TO FARMERS

The Yogi government has made payment of Rs.1 lakh 43000 crore of sugarcane growers by implementing a better strategy for the payment of long pending arrears from 2010. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has also directed to clear all pending payments of last station before starting of the new sugarcane session. From the last one and half years our country and the whole world has been battling with covid pandemic but during the same period after directions of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath all sugar mills were running properly and sugarcane growers kept selling their ctob to the sugar mills. Even new sugar mills started in Ramala, Munderwa and Pipraich. Licence system was abolished in the khandsari sector. The Yogi government has decided that sugar Mills of Western region will start running from 28th october, while sugar Mills of the central region will start functioning from 25th October and the sugar mills in eastern region will start from the first week of November. SMS system for parchi is now prevailing among sugarcane growers and the practice of low weighing has been brought to minimum. The total area of sugarcane cultivation in the state has increased by 8 lakh hectares in the last 4 years.

ESCROW ACCOUNT BECAME INSTRUMENTAL

The farmers are again happy after the initiative of timely payment of sugarcane price taken by the Yogi government. After coming into power in 2017 Yogi government made a system of escrow account in the state for ensuring the timely payment of sugarcane price. This new system brought transparency in the payment of sugarcane to the farmers from sugar mills. Now the account of sugar price is being jointly operated by the signatures of Mill representative, district sugarcane officer and senior sugar cane development inspector. In earlier regimes sugarcane price used to be 85% of the sale price of sugar on the other hand after 2017, Yogi government has provided 85% price of other sugar cane products like molasses and press mud to the sugar cane growers. Not just that, now sugar Mills who are making ethanol directly

from the sugarcane juice have tagged 55% price of the total production of ethanol and 80% price of the directly produced ethanol for the payment.

Mills have also tagged 65% price amount of the selling price of that ethanol which is being used for production of sanitizer. These steps have solved the problem of sugarcane payment.

EMPOWERING SMALL FARMERS

The Yogi government is going to give big relief to the farmers through drip irrigation. First time in 2021-22 a target is fixed to establish a drip irrigation system in 30 thousand hectare sugarcane cultivation area. 2566 farmers have been selected for drip irrigation schemes in the state. Drip irrigation will reduce the use of irrigation water by 50 to 60% . With the implementation of this technique the use of underground water will also reduce exponentially. The range of the scheme will be increased phase wise. This scheme will benefit a lot of the small sugar cane growers. This scheme will also benefit the farmers of BPL card owners, scheduled caste and scheduled Tribes. The better management of water resources will also increase the income of farmers. To strengthen the sugarcane farmers of the state, the Yogi government has taken many big steps. Departmental toll free number 1800 1213 203 has been released for various problems of sugarcane growers. Not just this sugar cane growers are also getting their problems related to survey calendar and parchi fixed after registering them toll free number 1800 1035 823. Out of 122125 complaints registered on this initiative 1179 26 problems have been solved.

FARMERS DOING WONDERS

A farmer from Barabanki district Harish Chandra has shown a new way to the farmers of the state by growing dragon fruit in the Amseruwa village of Barabanki district after getting laurels from Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. He has earlier successfully grown the chia seeds in Barabanki which is considered a super fruit in China and America.

TAKING CARE OF FOOD PROVIDERS

Loan waiver worth 36 thousand crore rupees of 86 lakh small and marginal farmers.

First time in state, Uttar Pradesh Pharma production organisation policy 2020 has been implemented

291 E-NAM mandis have been established in Uttar Pradesh through which 87 lakh farmers and 34 thousand traders are associated.

Special subsidy of 400 rupees per quintal on seeds of wheat and 250 rupees per quintal on seeds of paddy will be provided to farmers.

Subsidy worth 2151.30 crore rupees on agriculture investments has been transferred directly into the accounts of farmers.

First time 45 agro products Mandi's are now free of Mandi fee. Also the government reduced the Mandi fee by 1%.

Under the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, an amount of Rs 2613 crore has been compensated to the farmers

A provision of Rs 500 crore has been made in the Chief Minister Krishak Durghatna Kalyan Yojana and its benefit has also been given to pattedars and bataidars (sharecroppers).

5,86,793 animals of the cow family are now secure at govansh ashraya stahals. Subsidy of 900 rupees per month on every cow.

The Bansagar irrigation project was completed by the government which was pending for the last 46 years.

300 crore rupees were given to agriculture science centres and other agricultural institutions in the last three years.

2000 quint mangoes were exported from the state in covid period. The quality of Dussheri mango will also increase.

To encourage the production of crops district wise, the scheme of 'one district one agro product' will be implemented

Fertilizer factory with the world's longest prilling tower is under construction in Gorakhpur.

> "ODOP scheme will help in the rise of unique handicraft and art of Uttar Pradesh and provide employment to skilled artisans. I hope that this MSME sector can realise the Omni directional development and carry forward the art of state to the world."
>
> *— Narendra Modi PrimeMinister*

PROPELLING INDUSTRIES

- The unique experiments of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who is involved in making the environment of Uttar Pradesh friendly for industries have opened new avenues for industrialization in the state.
- Uttar Pradesh has the highest number of MSME (Medium Small and Micro Enterprises) in the country, which is **89.99** lacs.
- State government has planned to establish **40** common facility centers at the cost of **200** crore rupees.
- Yogi Government has approved Uttar Pradesh micro small and medium enterprises (facilitation of establishment and operation) act **2020** on 18 August 2021.
- MoUs signed for investment of **4.68** lakh crore rupees in investor's summit. **371** projects worth almost **3** lakh crore rupees are functional.
- As per the data of the industrial development department, **40** foreign investor's proposals have given investment proposals worth **56,000** crore rupees to the government.
- **7** Japanese companies, **2** companies from Canada, **4** from Germany, **1** from Hong Kong, **2** from Singapore, **3** from United Kingdom, **5** from the United States and **4** Korean companies are investing in the state.
- **922** big and small industrial units are being set up in **15** districts of Uttar Pradesh including Mathura, Chitrakut Unnao and Ghaziabad. These units will soon start functioning.
- **3** electronics manufacturing clusters worth **40** thousand crore rupees are being set up in the state.

UP: FAVORITE DESTINATION FOR INVESTMENT

British High commissioner Alex Ellis visited Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on 20 August. He said that Britain and Uttar Pradesh could take forward their partnership in the field of higher Education. Under this academic exchange between state in state universities and UK universities can be increased. Britain can assist UP in areas related to technical support, designing and packaging, with regard to One District One Product (ODOP).

Netherlands ambassador Martin Van den Bergh met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on 31st August. Netherland expressed desire to co-operate in the dairy sector of Uttar Pradesh. During the visit, the ambassador said that Netherland can open a training centre in Uttar Pradesh to make the farmers of Uttar Pradesh expert in modern dairy techniques.

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UPFRONT

SUKHBIR BADAL'S COMEBACK QUEST
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POLICE: RENEW, RE-ARM, REFORM
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Ford
SANAND VEHICLE ASSEMBLY AND ENGINE PLANT
ENTRANCE
GATE-3

SHUTTING SHOP
Ford's manufacturing plant in Sanand, Gujarat

ANINDITO MUKHERJEE /GETTY IMAGES

AUTOMOBILE SECTOR

EMERGENCY EXIT

By M.G. Arun

In just 25 years of its operations—not too long for an auto manufacturer—Ford Motor Company of the US has decided to exit India. Not that those years were a smooth ride for the iconic maker of cars like Model T, Thunderbird and Mustang. While Ford found big success in India in models such as the Ikon, Endeavour and EcoSport, others like the Mondeo and Fusion did not do well. The company had posted accumulated operating losses of over $2 billion (around Rs 14,700 crore) and the demand for its vehicles was weak. According to Ford India president and MD Anurag Mehrotra, the company could not find a sustainable path to long-term profitability.

Scrapping this January the joint venture with Mahindra & Mahindra, inked in 2019, made matters worse for Ford. The JV had aimed to develop, market and distribute Ford vehicles in India as well as some Ford and Mahindra products in the high-growth international markets. With the JV undone, Ford's chances of survival in the Indian market grew bleaker.

Ford says it will shut down its Sanand (Gujarat) plant by the fourth quarter of 2021 and end vehicle and engineering manufacturing at its Chennai plant by 2022. Ford India has some 4,000 employees. The Sanand plant can produce 240,000 vehicles a year and the Chennai plant up to 200,000 vehicles. Ford will continue to sell cars in India through imports—media reports suggest high-end models like the Mustang Mach-E, Mustang and Ranger. It will also continue service support to existing customers, the company maintains.

The exit of three major auto MNCs in the past few years does not augur well for India. General Motors drove out of the country in 2017 following a decision to get out of non-profitable operations in a few regions, including India, Russia and West Europe. Top-end motorcycle-maker Harley Davidson left India in 2020 as part of its ‘Rewire’ strategy to focus on select markets, such as North America, Europe and parts of Asia. Harley had made losses of $96 million (around Rs 710 crore) in April-June 2020. This may not be a big loss in itself, but clearly, the company wasn’t expecting good demand in the near future. The pandemic has only increased the challenges for auto companies as they were forced to keep their retail outlets shut during the lockdown.

The Indian market had been especially tough for these MNCs due to the dominance of Japanese and Korean carmakers. Maruti Suzuki has around 48 per cent share in the market and Hyundai India around 17 per cent. Several auto MNCs entered India in the post-liberalisation period, driven by the business potential seen in a rising middle class and low household penetration of automobiles. The success of Maruti Suzuki (earlier Maruti Udyog) was proof of this market—the company, in its early phase, had a market share of 80 per cent!

Companies such as GM, Ford and Toyota set up big capacities in India eyeing future demand. However, the market did not grow as expected, especially for bigger cars. “In a high capex industry like auto, and a country like India where capital is expensive, capacity can be an albatross around the neck,” says Ravi Bhatia, president and director of JATO Dynamics India, an auto intelligence firm. For instance, the prices set by Maruti in the 1980s—Rs 47,000 for non-AC models and Rs 70,000 for AC ones—were hard to beat. Maruti focused on offering a cheaper car of reasonable quality with a good distribution and service network. The excise duty cuts on sub-four metre cars further helped the Japanese and Korean players. Bhatia adds that US and European companies found it tougher to make sub-four metre cars as their expertise was in larger vehicles.

GOODBYE, INDIA

FORD MOTOR CO.

EXITED: 2021

EMPLOYEES: 4,000

CAPACITY: 240,000 units a year at Sanand (Gujarat) plant; up to 200,000 in Chennai

WHY: Posted accumulated operating losses of over Rs 14,700 crore; demand for products low; JV with Mahindra didn’t take off

HARLEY DAVIDSON

EXITED: 2020

EMPLOYEES: 70

CAPACITY: 12,000 bikes a year at Bawal (Haryana) plant

WHY: To focus, as part of its ‘Rewire’ strategy, on select markets, such as North America, Europe and some parts of Asia

GENERAL MOTORS

EXITED: 2017

EMPLOYEES: 5,000

CAPACITY: A total of 225,000 vehicles at the Halol (Gujarat) and Talegaon Dabhade (Maharashtra) plants

WHY: Decision not to invest in non-profitable operations in a few regions, including India, Russia and western Europe

At the same time, demand has been down. Auto sales have seen a combined annual growth rate of just 1.5 per cent in India in the past five years, upsetting the plans of MNCs that have invested heavily in the Indian market. The government has announced a scrappage policy mandating compulsory inspections when car registrations lapse. But it’s not clear if this will have a significant impact on vehicle sales.

In August, wholesale auto sales numbers fell 12 per cent year on year. The industry attributed this to the shortage of semiconductors, which has impacted output, and high commodity prices, which has increased vehicle costs. Add to this the rising cost of fuel, and vehicle demand is expected to remain under pressure, forcing companies to restrategise in a ‘cost-conscious’ market like India.

The world over, auto companies are going through big revamp exercises as the pandemic takes its toll on their revenues. Besides, there is a discernible shift in global preferences towards ‘ACES’ (autonomous, connected, electric and shared) vehicles. Firms need to invest heavily in this. According to the Paris-based International Energy Agency, the number of global electric cars hit the 10 million mark in 2020, a 43 per cent increase over 2019. Battery electric vehicles accounted for two-thirds of new electric car registrations in 2020. China, with 4.5 million electric cars, is in the lead whereas Europe had the largest annual increase in 2020 to reach 3.2 million vehicles.

While some auto majors have left India, a few others have made an entry. MG Motor India, a subsidiary of Chinese automaker SAIC Motor, started operations in the country in 2019. Earlier this year, American electric carmaker Tesla registered its Indian arm and is expected to set up a manufacturing unit here if it foresees sufficient demand. ■

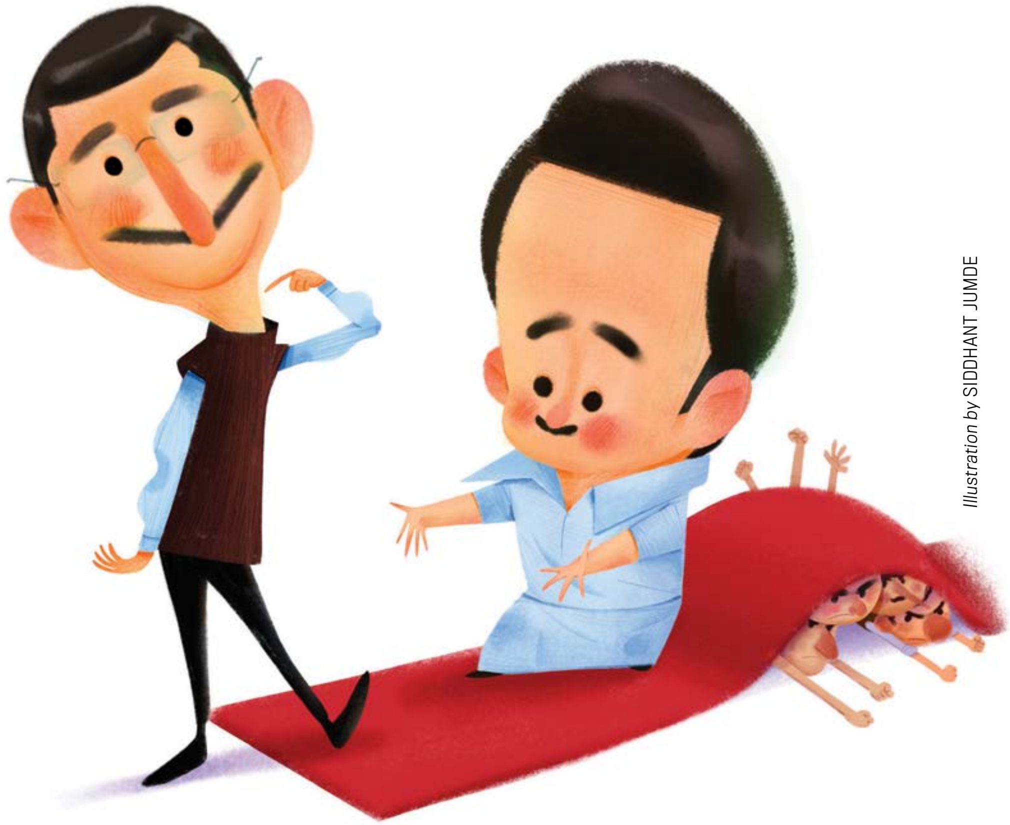


Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

GLASSHOUSE

ON HIGH ALERT

The Congress, CPI(M) and VCK, allies of the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), are demanding a recall of the recently appointed Tamil Nadu governor, **R.N. Ravi**. They fear the former IPS officer will interfere in the functioning of the state government the way Kiran Bedi, former IPS officer and ex-governor of Puducherry, did in the Union territory. Ravi's career in the Intelligence Bureau and as former deputy national security advisor have sparked these concerns. Interestingly, though, Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has welcomed the new arrival. Word is that the CM wants to pass several resolutions opposing central laws. Having the governor on his side might be just what he needs.

Return of an Ally?

Former NDA ally and LJP president **Chirag Paswan's** recent meetings with the RJD's Lalu Prasad and **Tejashwi Yadav** might have the BJP worried. Bihar's deputy CMs, Tarkishore Prasad and Renu Devi, were both seen at the ceremony marking the first death anniversary of LJP leader Ram Vilas Paswan. The very next day, BJP minister Neeraj Kumar Bablu made a point of announcing that Chirag was still a part of the NDA. Why the sudden show of solidarity?

VETERANS AT WAR

An ongoing clash in Rajasthan between BJP senior leader **Kailash Chandra Meghwal,** 87, and leader of opposition Gulab Chand Kataria has Jaipur political circles buzzing. In a recent letter to national party president J.P. Nadda, Meghwal accused Kataria of having cost the BJP votes with his gratuitous comments. Back in February, Kataria had sharply reacted to Meghwal questioning his leadership. Meghwal loyalists are watching this exchange with glee since Kataria at 76 is a year older than the party's cut-off age to hold office and his retirement could mean a vacancy.

T. NARAYAN/GETTY IMAGES

Gam-COVID-Vac
Sputnik V

SOVIET NOSTALGIA

The **Sputnik** Covid vaccine has triggered Soviet-era nostalgia in Punjab. A few Left-leaning activists and scholars have opted for the Russian-made vaccine available only in government hospitals. 'Sputnik' was also the name of a popular Soviet youth magazine translated into Punjabi for audiences in the Indian state. Its fame has clearly outlasted the Soviet Union itself.

What Next?

On September 12, a day after the exit of Gujarat chief minister **Vijay Rupani**, Bhupendra Patel was sworn in as the new CM of the state. So, where will the BJP accommodate Rupani? Party insiders believe Rupani, considered close to Union home minister Amit Shah, will be rehabilitated in a Raj Bhavan next year. But a contrarian insider imagines the former CM won't be as fortunate as his predecessor Anandiben Patel, who is now in her second gubernatorial stint. Gunning for the post of national party vice-president may be Rupani's best bet, the contrarian maintains.

–Sandeep Unnithan** with **Amarnath K. Menon, Anilesh S. Mahajan, Amitabh Srivastava, Rohit Parihar** and **Kiran D. Tare

BIJU BORO/AFP

TENSE STATE Indian soldiers patrol Guwahati, Assam, on Dec. 12, 2019, following protests against the CAA

AFSPA

WAR OR PEACE?

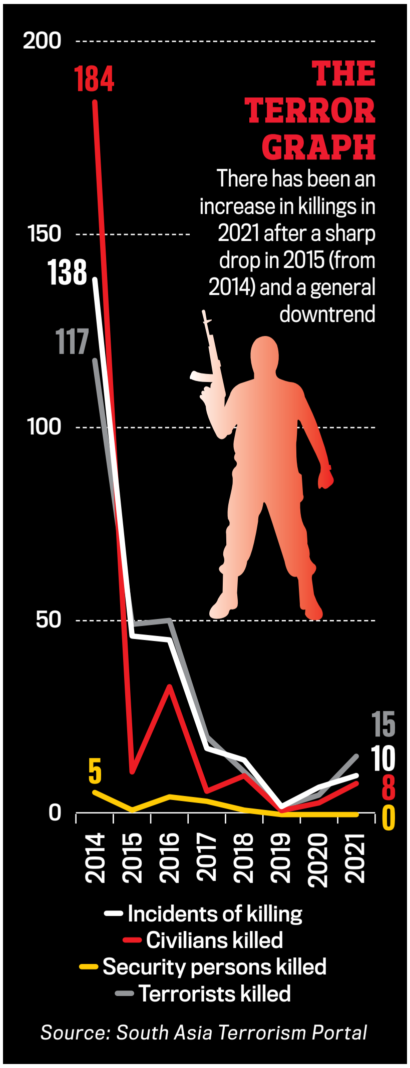
By Kaushik Deka

On September 11, the Assam government extended the 'disturbed area' status of the state by another six months under AFSPA or the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958. While the state government is yet to give a reason for the extension, the move has come at a time when the central and state governments, both led by the BJP, have been making regular claims that peace has returned to the northeastern state.

On September 4, Union home minister Amit Shah announced that the signing of a tripartite agreement between the Centre, state and six insurgent groups active in Assam's Karbi Anglong district was another milestone in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of an "insurgency-free, prosperous Northeast". In February 2020, the Centre signed another agreement with the representatives of all factions of the Bodo militant outfit National Democratic Front of Bodoland. Earlier this week, Paresh Baruah, chief of the United Liberation Front of Assam-Independent (ULFA-I), Assam's most dreaded insurgent group, also expressed willingness for the first time ever to join peace talks, provided Assam chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma played mediator.

These developments have led to a clamour for the removal of the AFSPA from the state, with human rights activists claiming the draconian law has been misused for political gains. "The government leaves no opportunity to claim peace in the state, so why does it need AFSPA? It's an open secret that various stakeholders do not want central funds—coming to the state in the name of eliminating terror—to dry out," says Dr Dibyajyoti Saikia, a Guwahati-based human rights activist.

The AFSPA, introduced to combat militancy in Nagaland in the 1950s, has been in force in Assam since 1990 when army operations were first launched against ULFA. Since then, it has been extended every six months. The Centre and state governments have concurrent powers to invoke the AFSPA. Besides Assam, it is in force in Nagaland, Manipur (excluding the Imphal Municipal Council area),



THE TERROR GRAPH

There has been an increase in killings in 2021 after a sharp drop in 2015 (from 2014) and a general downtrend

Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal

186

HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (58 IN ASSAM ALONE) BY ARMED FORCES BETWEEN 2012 AND 2016

Source: RTI

114

CASES AGAINST ARMED FORCES PERSONNEL OF ALLEGED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN 11 STATES (2000-20); ASSAM TOPPED LIST WITH 21 CASES

Source: National Campaign Against Torture

Changlang, Longding and Tirap districts of Arunachal Pradesh, and areas falling within the jurisdiction of eight police stations of districts in Arunachal Pradesh bordering Assam.

The dichotomy between peace claims and the simultaneous persistence with AFSPA in Assam was highlighted even by the 213th Report of the Department Related Standing Committee on Home Affairs on the "Security Situation in North-Eastern States of India", tabled in both houses of Parliament in July 2018: "The Committee is unable to comprehend the divergent perceptions of the situation in Assam. On the one hand, the ministry has asserted that there has been an improvement in the security situation in Assam, while, on the other, the area declared as disturbed under the AFSPA, has been increased.... This is a paradoxical situation that needs to be resolved. The Committee, therefore, recommends that the Central government and the state government should hold extensive discussions on the issue and narrow down their perception about the necessity of AFSPA in Assam".

A year later, Union minister of state for home affairs, G. Kishan Reddy, said in the Lok Sabha that the security situation in the northeastern states had "improved substantially" over the previous five years with a 66 per cent drop in insurgency-related incidents. South Asia Terrorism Portal (SATP) data found that terror-related incidents of killings in Assam fell from 138 in 2014 to seven in 2020. This year, though, there has been an increase, with 10 killings reported till date.

The state government asserts that with several armed outfits, such as ULFA and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN), still active in the Northeast, AFSPA cannot be removed just yet. However, says Chief Minister Sarma, "This does not prevent the Union and state governments to pursue peaceful negotiations with militant organisations." A state government official points to a series of kidnappings earlier this year and the killing of five truck drivers by Dimasa militants last month to back the importance of AFSPA.

While the Centre handles the review for Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, Assam and Manipur have been notifying "disturbed areas", a prerequisite for imposing AFSPA, on their own since 2017. The provision was withdrawn from Meghalaya in 2018 (after 27 years) and from Tripura in 2018 (after 18 years). In fact, the 2018 parliamentary standing committee report observed that in Tripura, the withdrawal of AFSPA had been quite successful in ensuring peace.

The AFSPA was drafted to provide legal immunity to the defence forces operating in areas witnessing armed resistance. Section 4 of the Act authorises military officers to arrest any person against whom there is a reasonable suspicion that he is about to commit a cognisable offence. It also grants special powers to the military to destroy structures that could be used as hideouts or training camps or a place from where attacks can be launched. Armed forces are allowed to open fire, irrespective of consequences, if prohibitory orders banning assembly of five or more persons, or carrying of arms and weapons are in force. Section 6 of the Act gives immunity to the armed forces discharging duties under the Act from prosecution, or other legal proceedings, except with the written permission of the Centre.

Union government data shows such sweeping powers have resulted in human rights violations. In 2017, an RTI applicant found that between 2012 and 2016, 186 complaints of human rights violations, including death and sexual crimes, were registered against the armed forces in states with AFSPA. With 58 complaints, Assam was second on the list. A report by the National Campaign Against Torture found that 114 cases of sexual violence were allegedly committed by armed forced in 11 states between 2000 and 2020. Assam topped the list with 21 cases. ■

***PANTHIC* VIBE**
Sukhbir Badal at gurdwara Charan Kanwal Sahib in Machhiwara, Aug. 30

ANI

PUNJAB ASSEMBLY ELECTION

SUKHBIR'S COMEBACK QUEST

By Anilesh S. Mahajan

On September 3, Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief Sukhbir Singh Badal suspended his statewide tour, 'Gall Punjab Di (conversations about Punjab)', in which he meant to cover about a hundred of the state's 117 assembly seats. The campaign, which began on August 18, was facing repeated disruptions from farmers agitating against the new central farm laws. One such incident in Moga on September 2 ended in a clash between protesters and the police, leaving many injured. Giving the yatra a break, Badal announced a three-member committee, comprising Rajya Sabha MP Balwinder Singh Bhunder, former Lok Sabha MP Prem Singh Chandumajra and SAD spokesperson Manjinder Singh Sirsa, to address the farmers' 'misgivings' about the party.

On September 10, Samyukt Kisan Morcha, the consortium of 32 agitating farmers' unions, threatened to oppose all political activity until the farm laws were repealed. The contentious laws will almost certainly be an emotionally and politically charged issue in the Punjab polls, due early 2022. Following the SAD's split with the BJP last September, Badal has been trying to make common cause with the rural farmers on the issue. Rural farmers form a big chunk of the SAD's alienated *panthic* voters—those who take their cues from the Sikh religious establishment.

Panthic voters are upset with the SAD for various reasons: the perceived mishandling of the investigation into incidents of sacrilege of the Guru Granth Sahib in 2015 and the alleged involvement of SAD leaders in drug trafficking, illegal sand mining and corruption. In the 2017 assembly election, the SAD lost the *panthic* votes to the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) and the Congress. The tally of 15 seats was its worst assembly poll performance in post-insurgency Punjab (current strength is 14 MLAs).

Panthic voters determine the outcome in 48 of the 117 seats, and Badal has been trying hard to dispel the notion that his party has deviated from the core *panthic* agenda. First, the SAD reversed its stand on the abrogation of Article 370 and the downgrading of Jammu and Kashmir into a Union territory. The party had voted in favour of the move in Parliament despite the Akalis' Anandpur Sahib resolution in 1973 calling for devolution of powers to the states. The party has also distanced itself from the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and demanded the inclusion of Muslims in its ambit. There is also an attempt to return to Akali traditions. For instance, SAD meetings have shifted from five-star hotels to gurdwaras.

The SAD has practically no chance

of returning to power unless it regains the *panthic* vote bank. The long-pending election to the 170-member governing body of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) would have been a good indicator of its hold on this segment of the electorate. However, victory in the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) election in August has offered some hope—the party won 27 of the 46 seats.

This is the first time in three decades that the SAD will be contesting the Punjab election without Sukhbir's father and five-time chief minister Parkash Singh Badal in the lead. The 93-year-old SAD patriarch has withdrawn from active politics. Sukhbir hasn't revealed if Badal Sr will contest the election or who will be the party's CM face. The onus of rebuilding the SAD ahead of the election is on Sukhbir, who has made an early start by announcing candidates for 64 seats. "While this will give SAD candidates time to plan their campaign, the rebels will scout for opportunities outside the party," says Ashutosh Kumar, professor of political science at Panjab University.

Eyeing the Dalit vote, Badal has tied up with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and offered it 20 seats. The BSP lost all the 111 seats it contested in 2017 and had a vote share of 1.6 per cent. The SAD is hoping to benefit from the BSP's base among the Ravidasi and Ramdasi Sikhs in the Doaba and Majha regions. Independent analysts, though, are sceptical. "In the past, the BSP failed to transfer its votes to allies in Punjab. The 2022 poll will be no different," says Prof. Surinder Singh Jodhka of the School of Social Sciences at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Badal has announced that the SAD government will have two deputy chief ministers—a Dalit and a Hindu. Dalits make up about 32 per cent of Punjab's 30 million people. This includes the Mazhabi Sikhs (Dalits who converted to Sikhism). Discontent is brewing among the SAD's Mazhabi Sikh supporters due to tensions with Jat Sikhs, who control most of the farmlands in Punjab. Only about 3.5 per cent of private farms belong to the Dalits.

The Punjab Village Common Lands (Regulation) Act, 1961, had reserved 33 per cent of the common agricultural land in villages for Scheduled Castes, to be taken on lease. But Jat Sikhs allegedly hold large portions of such land through proxies. The BJP has said it will ensure that landless Dalit farmers get the surplus land. The party has also announced that it will pick a Dalit as CM if voted to power. These assurances only add to the SAD's challenges.

The absence of BJP as an ally is bound to pinch the SAD in the urban pockets and Hindu strongholds. Upper caste Hindus, who dominate 45 urban constituencies in Punjab, are largely Congress and BJP supporters. While in alliance, SAD candidates benefitted from the transfer of BJP votes in these segments. After the split, Badal has reached out to Hindus, hobnobbing with their religious figures and inducting upper caste Hindus such as former BJP leaders Anil Joshi and R.K. Gupta and Hans Raj Josan of the Congress. He is also promoting Hindu leaders from his own party in Malwa.

Joshi and Gupta's induction has caused some friction with the BSP. Badal announced that the duo would be the party's candidates from Amritsar North and Sujanpur—seats that had apparently been promised to the BSP. Badal offered the BSP the Sham Chaurasi and Kapurthala seats instead.

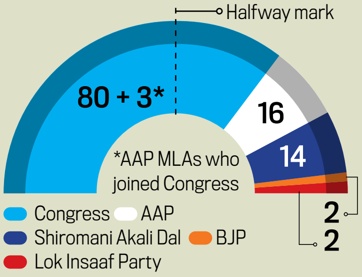
To woo the urban voter, Badal has held meetings with traders and industrialists and come out with a separate manifesto for them. The festering farmers' stir has impacted urban areas as well. Some corporate houses have exited citing law and order problems, which Badal puts at the doorstep of the Amarinder Singh government. He also accuses the ruling Congress of scams and pushing Punjab into a power crisis.

Whether any of this will create a momentum for the SAD in the assembly poll is hard to predict at this point. The state is in a political ferment and will almost certainly witness realignments as the poll draws nearer. On September 10, Sukhbir couldn't press ahead with the planned restart of his 'Gall Punjab Di' tour from Amloh, a Congress turf in Fatehgarh Sahib district. SAD leaders hope the farmers' unions will soon relent and stop disrupting the 100-day scheduled tour of the state. That journey will hold clues to the challenges that lie ahead for the party in its bid to reclaim power in Punjab. ■

BATTLEGROUND PUNJAB

ASSEMBLY POSITION

Total seats 117



CASTE/ COMMUNITY MATRIX

Malwa (69 seats)
Jat Sikh, Hindu (upper caste), Mazhabi Sikh, Bazigar, Rai Sikh, Rajput Sikh, Valmiki

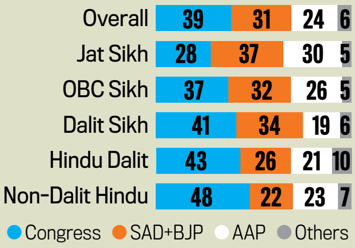
Doaba (23 seats)
Jat Sikh, Ramdasi, Ravidasi, Valmiki, Hindu (upper caste), Sikh (upper caste), Mazhabi Sikh, Saini, Gujjar

Majha (25 seats)
Hindu (upper caste), Rajput, Arya, Mahasha, Saini, Mazhabi Sikh, Valmiki, Jat Sikh

Majha
Doaba
Malwa

VOTE SHARE TRENDS

2017 assembly election (in %)



Source: CSDS

Graphic by ASIT ROY

ANI

NEW FRONTIERS CM Mamata Banerjee at the polyfilm factory project opening at Panaghar, Sept. 10

WEST BENGAL

DIDI MEANS BUSINESS

By Romita Datta

It took more than a decade and three back-to-back assembly wins for the Mamata Banerjee government to roll out the red carpet again for the Tatas. Mamata came to power on the back of a farmers’ movement in Nandigram-Singur against the land acquisition for the Tata Nano factory (2006-08), and it hasn’t been easy for her government to shed the anti-industry image it acquired in the bargain.

Even after all the talk of Rs 12 lakh crore worth of investment proposals from the five editions of the Bengal Global Business Summit (2015-19), actual investments “were Rs 50,000-60,000 crore in the past decade”, says a senior government official on condition of anonymity. “Of this, the Centre’s contribution was around Rs 10,000-12,000 crore. As for jobs, around 100,000 were created in big industries and another 300,000 in MSMEs,” adds the official. Ex-industry minister and current finance minister Amit Mitra, however, insists that 40 per cent of said investment proposals are in various stages of implementation.

6,000

ACRES

Available land bank with the WBIDC in the form of 12 industrial parks

With a third and decisive election victory under her belt, Mamata Banerjee believes it is time her government made a determined effort to bring industry to the state. A telling declaration of this intent was new industry minister Partha Chatterjee’s statement that the Tatas are among the “most respected business houses in the country and are most welcome to come and invest in Bengal”. A new Tata Centre is coming up at Rajarhat, Kolkata’s IT hub, and the government is tying up with the Tata Memorial Hospital, Mumbai, to upgrade the SSKM Hospital and Medical College.

Mamata knows the 2021 mandate was largely due to her government’s social welfare schemes, but “she also realises that industry needs a big push to create jobs for the youth and stop the drain of human capital from the state”, says the industry minister. To this end, she is expanding the scope of IT and ITES, which, as per government claims, have seen a five-fold increase from 500 to 2,600 units and a doubling of exports (Rs 29,000 crore in 2018-19) and employment generation (from 90,000 to 210,000 jobs) in the past 10 years.

Mamata was hoping to launch the industrialisation drive in her new term with some big-bang investments, but had to settle for the Kolkata-based Dhunseri Group’s Rs 1,250 crore polymer film manufacturing factory at Panagarh in West Burdwan. It will come up on 38 acres carved out of the Panagarh Industrial Park’s 1,458 acre land bank. Land acquisition is still a big hurdle in the state. The TMC government, back in 2015, adopted a policy of direct purchase of land by private players from landowners/ farmers. The state’s hands-off policy has been a dampener of sorts for industrial houses, but the authorities are telling prospective businesses to head to the 12 industrial parks, where an estimated 6,000 acres of land, owned by the West Bengal Industrial Development Corporation, lies unutilised. There’s also a Scheme for Approved

Industrial Park (SAIP) to encourage private investors to set up industrial parks on their own land, in order to qualify for tax exemptions and other incentives such as subsidised electricity. But it may not be enough, says Nilanjan Ghosh, director, Observer Research Foundation (ORF). "Big-ticket investments in manufacturing will not come unless the state agrees to be a facilitator in acquiring land," says Ghosh.

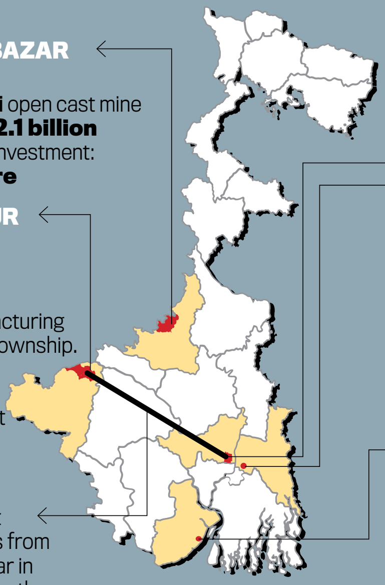
To get around the land availability issue in Kolkata and the suburban districts of North and South 24 Parganas, the state is giving industrial park status to investors setting up units on land parcels as small as 5 acres. That status translates into incentives like full reimbursement of stamp duty on land; loans to build a power substation; a 1.5 km approach road to connect to a major arterial road; and a cashback of Rs 2 crore. With this, cold chains, fish/poultry farms and warehouses of up to 5 acres will be able to avail themselves of industrial park status and incentives. Chief secretary H.K. Dwivedi says the state plans to set up 100 new industrial parks, which will also inevitably boost the job market.

Mamata has formed a 16-member committee, the West Bengal Industrial Promotion Board, to clear all bottlenecks and expedite clearances. And things are beginning to look up. On the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade's (DPIIT) ease of doing business index, Bengal is now in ninth position, ahead of Gujarat. Ghosh sees "a lot of potential in the [state's] service sector" businesses of hospitality, healthcare, transport and tourism.

The services sector already contributes about 55 per cent to the NSDP (net state domestic product). In the past decade, it has grown about 7 per cent, hinting that a shift is happening from manufacturing to services in the state. ITES (or IT-enabled services) have played a big part in this. Of the 200 acres at the Silicon Valley Tech Hub in Rajarhat, 160 acres are now occupied. "The Bengal Silicon Valley in New Town is fast becoming a satellite city," says Partha Chatterjee. Infosys has started work in its offices here, Wipro is scaling up with a second campus and the two are promising 10,000 jobs. Bengal plans to raise its share in the country's IT exports to 25 per cent by 2030.

> **Bengal is now 9th in the DPIIT ease of doing business index, ahead of even Gujarat**

CORRIDORS OF HOPE



MUHAMMADBAZAR
(Birbhum district)
Deocha Pachami open cast mine with a reserve of **2.1 billion tonnes** of coal. Investment: **Rs 12,000 crore**

RAGUNATHPUR
(Purulia district)
Jangal Sundari Karmanagari, an integrated manufacturing cluster industrial township. Expected to draw **Rs 72,000 crore** investment and create **70,000 jobs**

1,856 km freight corridor stretches from Dankuni to Amritsar in Punjab, via Raghunathpur

DANKUNI
(Hooghly district)

RAJARHAT
(North 24 Parganas district)
Bengal Silicon Valley Tech hub has offices of 24 IT firms, including TCS, Reliance Jio, Airtel, Infosys and Wipro. State IT exports are projected at **Rs 40,000 cr.** by 2024

TAJPUR
(Purba Medinipur district)
Proposed deep sea port with investment of **Rs 15,000 crore**

Graphic by ASIT ROY

Mamata has also launched an industrial township —Jangal Sundari Karmanagari (JSK) in Raghunathpur in Purulia; it will overlap with the freight corridor between Amritsar and Dankuni. JSK will develop 2,483 acres into an integrated manufacturing cluster at Ragunathpur. The government and the National Industrial Corridor Development Corporation (NICDC) will form a 50:50 SPV to access the benefits of the 1,856 km freight corridor connecting Bengal to Punjab. "The industrial corridor will fetch investments worth Rs 72,000 crore and create lakhs of jobs," Mamata said at the launch in Panagarh on September 1.

The government is also banking on the "largest coal block" in the world—the Deocha Pachami open cast mine, in Muhammadbazar of Birbhum district, with estimated reserves of 2.1 billion tonnes of coal. A Rs 15,000 crore plan is ready to develop the block. Extracting the coal will be a challenge as the deposits lie 200-300 metres beneath a thick crest of basalt rock—also the reason why other states that were offered the block backed out.

Business commentator Pratim Ranjan Bose says the state government's adversarial relationship with the Centre is a big reason Bengal finds it hard to raise its industry profile. "The state sniggered when the [Union] finance minister announced the Kolkata-Siliguri highway in the 2021-22 budget. This opposition for the sake of opposition is holding up development in north Bengal. So, instead of Siliguri becoming a logistics hub, the focus of the entire Northeast and neighbouring Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan is gradually shifting to Guwahati, which is fast developing into a trade and transit hub. Even Tripura is now depending on Guwahati for its supply chain instead of Bengal," he says. Out of India's $16 billion (Rs 1.18 lakh crore) exports to Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, West Bengal's contribution is minuscule (15 per cent in rice and about 10 per cent in steel). Obviously, Bengal still has a long way to go before it becomes an industrial powerhouse in the country. ■

INTERVIEW

“WE HAVE FOCUSED ON BRINGING CHANGE ON THE GROUND”

The Covid pandemic did not spare Himachal Pradesh. Tourism in the state was hit hard, but the apple economy mitigated some of the damage. Chief Minister **Jai Ram Thakur**, 56, spoke to Group Editorial Director **Raj Chengappa** and Senior Editor **Anilesh S. Mahajan** on the impressive progress his government has made in vaccinating its citizens and sounds confident that tourism and other state industries will soon be running at full steam. Excerpts:

SANDEEP SAHDEV

“HIMACHAL IS THE FIRST STATE TO HAVE ACHIEVED 100 PER CENT VACCINATION (FIRST DOSE) AMONG ITS ADULT POPULATION”

Q. Horticulture is your economy’s mainstay. Were you able to sustain production despite the pandemic? What steps are you taking to improve the situation?

A. At around Rs 4,500 crore, apple cultivation contributes significantly to our state’s economy and we did well last year despite the Covid restrictions. The challenge most orchard owners face is that once the apples reach the market, it creates a glut and prices crash. Apart from government agencies, we are working with the private sector to set up cold chain facilities and other infrastructure. We are expecting that these units will be commissioned next season onwards, and we will have the capacity to process the fruit as well. We are also assisting orchard owners to buy hailstorm safety nets by providing 80 per cent subsidy on it. Apart from this, we are supporting them in setting up solar fencing to keep away wild animals from their fruit trees.

Q. How badly was Himachal’s tourism industry hit by the two waves of Covid?

A. It was bad. The tourism revenue took a hit of around 75 per cent last year. But this year, with things opening up, revenue has revived by about 50 per cent. We are just keeping our fingers crossed. We had earlier relaxed restrictions on tourists vis-à-vis producing RT-PCR tests and vaccination certificates to enter the state. We witnessed a sudden rush of tourists but it also led to a surge in active cases. So, we had to put the restrictions back. We had also opened the educational institutions in the states from August 2 but had to shut them down again as well. We are focusing heavily on vaccination.

Q. What is the status of Covid vaccination in the state?

A. Himachal Pradesh is the first state to have achieved 100 per cent vaccination (first dose) among its adult population. Initially, we faced challenges after incorrect rumours of side effects began doing the rounds. So, we went on a massive awareness campaign through our healthcare workers and video-conferencing. I spoke twice to elected members of Panchayati Raj institutions and set targets for them in their respective wards and panchayats of reaching out to every household. Whatever the terrain, we have reached every corner of the state and, in many cases, healthcare workers trekked for three-four days to reach remote areas. By the end of November, our state will be fully vaccinated.

Q. How have the other industries in the state fared during the pandemic?

A. Like other states, our economy, too, was massively hit by Covid. Despite the economic slowdown in 2019, we had got investment MoUs worth Rs 96,000 crore, but these projects were hit by Covid. They are finally breaking ground now. Also, production in general is happening at a satisfactory pace.

Q. How are you improving connectivity in the state?

A. There are some four-lane highway projects, including the Kiratpur to Manali highway, that were delayed because of certain issues. We, along with the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), have now sorted out these issues and fresh tenders were recently issued. Now we are accelerating all the highways projects.

Regarding air connectivity, we have two airports at Shimla and Dharamshala, but they are small airports and evoke the load penalty, which drives up ticket prices, and which, in turn, discourages travellers. As a solution, we are also developing a greenfield airport in Mandi. The relevant agencies have done their surveys at the location and I met the Union finance and civil aviation ministers recently to push it through. But the problem is that the state is expected to cough up the money for land acquisition. This airport's land alone will cost more than Rs 4,000 crore. We will need financial help.

Q. There have been reports of several landslides—and related deaths—in your state this year...

A. This time, apart from the normal and expected rainfall, we witnessed some extraordinary instances of landslides, even during dry and sunny days in some instances. We have taken up the issue with the home ministry and requested that a scientific study of these instances be done to see if we can have a system of advance warning.

> **"OUR TOURISM REVENUE WAS HIT BADLY LAST YEAR. WITH THINGS OPENING UP THIS YEAR, IT IS REVIVING AND WE ARE KEEPING OUR FINGERS CROSSED"**

Q. What are your immediate priorities?

A. We are focusing on rebuilding the connect with the people since, due to Covid restrictions, many of the interactions were happening virtually. The state is commemorating its 50th year of statehood this year. Apart from holding a special session of the Vidhan Sabha on September 17, addressed by the President of India, from October 2, we are launching the Himachal Tab aur Himachal Ab (Himachal then and now) Yatra, which will cut across the state's 68 assembly segments. It will be dedicated to the people, giving them credit for building infrastructure, health and educational institutions in the state.

Q. How confident are you about getting re-elected next year?

A. For the first time, there are no issues against the government. There can be some anti-incumbency but no big issues that the opposition can take advantage of. As far as planning and strategising for the poll is concerned, there is still time for the party to do so. In Himachal, we have focused on bringing change on the ground. Our government this time ensured that the development doesn't get handicapped by not reaching the last mile. There is no regional bias (between upper and lower Himachal) in the allotment of development work. There is no vindictive politics going on in the state. My only focus is on development and ensuring that the projects are executed efficiently. We're accessible. All my ministers interact with the people regularly. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a charismatic leader and has contributed to the expansion of the BJP in the country. He will certainly be a factor in the assembly poll in Himachal Pradesh and the electorate will see the positive contribution of the state government.

Q. What about the upcoming by-elections?

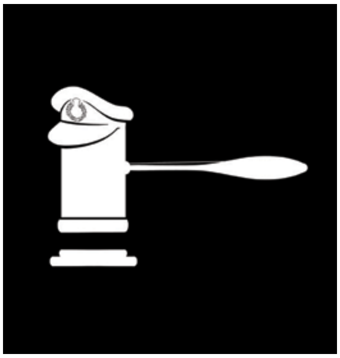
A. Four by-elections are due, three for the assembly and one for the Lok Sabha. The Mandi Lok Sabha constituency alone is spread across 17 assembly segments. We are confident of retaining the seat. The assembly tenure is little more than a year away and if the delay in by-election goes beyond November, it may discourage the Election Commission (ECI) from holding these polls. We are waiting for instructions from the ECI on this. ■

PRAKASH SINGH

GUEST COLUMN

Renew, Re-arm, Reform

It is one of the ironies of present-day India that while we are capable of sending a mission to the moon, of launching intercontinental ballistic missiles, developing a bullet train and enjoy the status of being a formidable IT power, we are still—seven decades after Independence—stuck with a police force with the same old colonial structure and a feudal mindset. It's not that efforts have not been made in the past to modernise the police. Several commissions at the state and Central levels have made recommendations to restructure the police force. However, the state governments, which have jurisdiction over the 'police' and 'law and order', made only cosmetic changes and were averse to reforms that would insulate the police from political pressure and make it accountable to the people.



Filling vacancies in sanctioned posts and improving capabilities in forensics, tech and intel are crucial for the police force

The National Police Commission (1979-1981) has observed that "the relationship that existed between the police and the foreign power before Independence was allowed to continue with the only change that the foreign power was substituted by the political party in power". The basic law—the Police Act of 1861—remained practically unaltered and "no attempts were made to redefine the relationship between the police and the politically oriented government".

In 2006, the Supreme Court, responding to a petition based essentially on the recommendations of the National Police Commission, issued a set of comprehensive directions to insulate the police from external pressures, give security of tenure to the police chief and officers in the field, separate investigation from law and order in metros, give autonomy to departmental officers in personnel matters and set up complaints authorities at district and state levels with a view to conducting inquiries into cases of serious misconduct by police personnel. Some states passed laws, purportedly in compliance with the judicial directions, but in fact with the intention to circumvent them, taking advantage of the proviso that the SC's directions will be operative only till the Centre and the states "pass the requisite legislation". The remaining states passed executive orders, but the fact is that all states violated the SC's directions either in letter or in spirit or both.

The court's direction to set up a security commission in every state "to ensure that the state government does not exercise unwarranted influence or pressure on the state police and to lay down the broad policy guidelines so that the state police always acts according to the laws of the land and the Constitution of the country" were the most important, which, if sincerely implemented, would have brought about a sea change in the working of the police. The direction regarding separation of investigation and law and order functions was the easiest and, in principle, there is no opposition to it. The states, however, plead financial constraints in increasing manpower.

We don't need reforms for the glory of the police or to give more powers to its officers; they are meant to create an environment where the police are able to uphold the rule of law and feel accountable to the laws of the land and the people of the country. The reforms are also relevant for a healthy democracy and to sustain the momentum of economic progress.

The internal security situation of the country has always been a matter of concern. It would not be surprising if the developments in Afghanistan embolden Pakistan to push *jihadis* across our western borders to create mayhem in the frontier states, especially Jammu and Kashmir. It's also possible that pro-Pak elements will create disorder in the hinterland. A well-armed, highly motivated police force, led by competent officers, who are fed timely intelligence, would be our best guarantee against the depredations of such subversive elements. The capabilities of the Central Armed Police Forces would need substantial augmentation.

Reforms, in this context, become all the more imperative. The government should give high priority to at least those reforms that do not have political implications, such as filling up vacancies and, thereby, increasing manpower, improving infrastructure in terms of transport, communications and forensics, energising the intelligence network and sharpening the technological capabilities of the police force. There is no room for delay. As Sun Tzu said, "quickness is the essence of the war". Other reforms of a more fundamental nature may be taken up in due course of time. ■

Prakash Singh, *Chairman, Indian Police Foundation, is a former DG, BSF; DGP UP and DGP Assam*

Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

आज तक

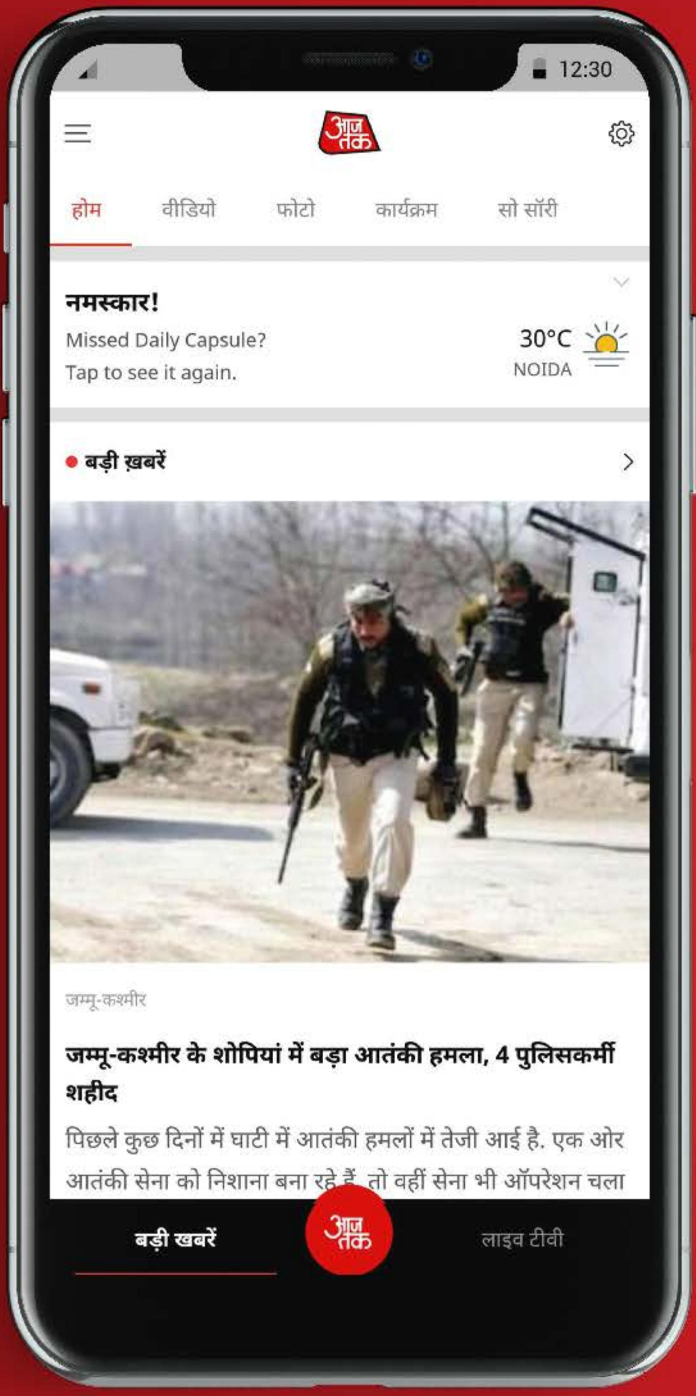
देश का नं. 1
हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है



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आज तक

होम वीडियो फोटो कार्यक्रम सो सॉरी

नमस्कार!
Missed Daily Capsule?
Tap to see it again.

30°C
NOIDA

● बड़ी ख़बरें

जम्मू-कश्मीर

जम्मू-कश्मीर के शोपियां में बड़ा आतंकी हमला, 4 पुलिसकर्मी शहीद

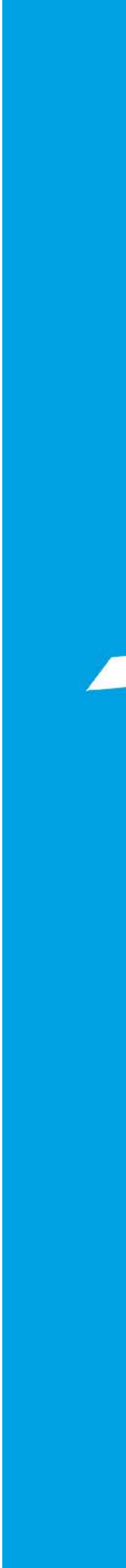
पिछले कुछ दिनों में घाटी में आतंकी हमलों में तेजी आई है. एक ओर आतंकी सेना को निशाना बना रहे हैं, तो वहीं सेना भी ऑपरेशन चला

बड़ी खबरें आज तक लाइव टीवी

ASSET MONETISATION
THE BIG PUSH

The Modi government hopes to raise Rs 6 lakh crore over the next four years by 'monetising' public sector assets–leasing them out to the private sector for long-term operations. Can it deliver on this game-changing idea?

BY M.G. ARUN AND SHWWETA PUNJ / *Illustration by* NILANJAN DAS



When Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power in 2014, one of his big promises was to deliver "minimum government, maximum governance". On these lines, his government was expected to cede control of some public assets to the private sector, either through outright sale or by bringing private sector firms into their operation/management to make them more productive. However, his government achieved little on this count in its first term, cornered as it was by the opposition's "*suit-boot ki sarkar*" jibe.

In its Union budget in February this year, the Modi government made high-decibel pronouncements in two areas involving the private sector—disinvestment and asset monetisation. The initial results of its disinvestment push have been mixed. The sale of Air India has received interest from a few private suitors, with the bidding process slated to be completed within this fiscal year, while LIC (Life Insurance Corporation) is gearing up for a public listing of shares this year. However, the sale of PSUs (public sector units) such as BPCL (Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited), Container Corporation of India and IDBI Bank remain in limbo. It is at this juncture that the government decided to embark on its next big drive—asset monetisation. Under this, public assets are to be leased to private firms for an upfront fee. This, the government believes, is likely an easier target to hit. It also sidesteps the opposition to privatisation that has scuppered

WHAT'S ON THE MENU

The Centre plans to monetise assets in 13 sectors, with an estimated value of Rs 6 lakh crore, between FY22 and FY25. Roads, railways, telecom, power transmission and power generation top the list

ROADS

▸₹1,60,200 cr

26,700 km
Asset length to be monetised

20%
Asset length as a percentage of potential asset base

AVIATION*

▸₹20,782 cr

FY22: ₹3,600 cr
Bhubaneswar, Varanasi, Amritsar, Trichy, Indore, Raipur

FY23: ₹4,295 cr
Calicut, Coimbatore, Nagpur, Patna, Madurai, Surat, Ranchi, Jodhpur

FY24: ₹4,193 cr
Chennai, Vijayawada Tirupati, Vadodara, Bhopal, Hubli

FY25: ₹1,857 cr
Imphal, Agartala, Udaipur, Dehradun, Rajahmundry

RAILWAYS

▸₹1,52,496 cr

Railway stations
400 (5.5% of stations)

Passenger trains
90 (5% of total trains)

Railway tracks
1 route of ~1,400 km (2% of network)

Konkan railways
741 km

Hill railways
4,244 km

Goods sheds
265 (21% of all railway-owned goods sheds)

MINING

▸₹28,747 cr

160 PROJECTS
identified for monetisation

761
mineral blocks are expected to be auctioned between FY22 and FY25

TELECOM

▸₹35,100 cr

Bharatnet Fibre
~2.86 lakh route-km proposed to be bid out through PPP model by DoT through nine packages comprising 16 states

BSNL & MTNL Towers
~14,900 towers have been considered for monetisation

PORTS

▸₹12,828 cr

31 PROJECTS IN MAJOR PORTS

Paradip port **4**
Deen Dayal port (Kandla) **4**
JNPT(Mumbai) **3**
Mormugao port **3**
Mumbai port **2**
S.P. Mukerji port Kolkata (Khidderpore) **4**
S.P. Mukerji port Kolkata (Haldia) **3**
Visakhapatnam port **4**
V.O. Chidambaranar port **3**
New Mangalore port **1**

POWER TRANSMISSION

▸₹45,200 cr

4,13,407 CIRCUIT km
Transmission asset base as of March 31, 2019

~28,608 CIRCUIT km
Total transmission assets considered for monetisation

POWER GENERATION

▸₹39,832 cr

Hydro assets (existing): **3,355 MW**
RE* assets (existing): **1,962 MW**
Hydro assets (to come online): **117 MW**
RE* assets (to come online): **532 MW**
TOTAL **5,970 MW**
(*RE: Renewable Energy)

NATURAL GAS PIPELINES

▸₹24,462 cr

7,928 KM
Operational pipeline assets identified for monetisation

~200 KM
New pipeline assets (yet to become operational) to be monetised

PETROLEUM PRODUCT PIPELINES

▸₹24,462 cr

Petroleum product pipelines: **3,196 km**
LPG pipelines: **733 km**
Hydrogen generation plants: **2**

▸Value of the assets *Names of the cities given are airports

WAREHOUSING
▸₹28,900 cr

Storage infra. (FCI): **₹17,500 cr**
Storage infra. (CWC): **₹11,400 cr**
TOTAL: **₹28,900 cr**

(FCI: Food Corporation of India;
CWC: Central Warehousing Corporation)

SPORTS STADIA
▸₹11,450 cr

Marquee project: Development of JLN Stadium

₹7,853 cr
Indicative capex investment

EXISTING FACILITIES

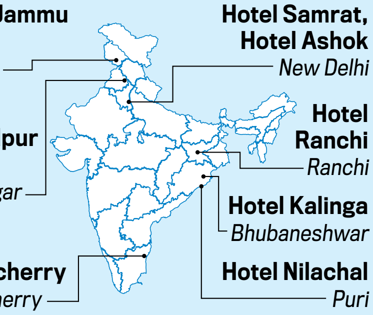
Main Arena	**Auditorium**	**Hostel complex**
60,000 seating capacity	**2,172** seating capacity	**140** rooms + **100** under construction

URBAN REAL ESTATE
▸₹15,000 cr

₹32,276 cr
Redevelopment of seven general pool residential accommodation colonies in Delhi

₹15,000 cr
Development of residential/ commercial units on 240 acres in Ghitorni (Delhi)

HOSPITALITY ASSETS



Source: NITI Aayog

previous attempts to generate revenue from public assets.

On August 23, Union finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced the launch of the Centre's National Monetisation Pipeline (NMP). Under this, it intends to lease major infrastructure projects to private firms over the next four year for periods ranging from 15 to 30 years, and hopes to raise about Rs 6 lakh crore in the process—that's India's education and health budgets combined. This will allow it to fund its ambitious infrastructure plans, bridge the budget deficit and hopefully revive the private sector's 'animal spirits'. The Centre also hopes this will allow it to brush off criticism that it has failed to achieve its reform agenda, aimed at reviving public sector assets that have been performing far below their potential due to inefficient state management. This will also give it an opportunity to address the gaps in the earlier UPA government's PPP (public private partnership) models, as laid out in the recommendations of the 2015 Vijay Kelkar committee.

Montek Singh Ahluwalia, former deputy chairman of the erstwhile Planning Commission, says the government should attempt both monetisation and privatisation "because we don't know what's best". Privatisation is a tougher sell, because it involves giving up ownership of state assets like land; it is far easier to justify a 30-year lease. The NITI Aayog, which was tasked with the creation of the NMP, also highlights that there is a history of institutional investors and funds investing in existing infrastructure projects, such as toll roads, ports and airports, in North America, Europe and Australia. More recently, similar investments have taken place in the Asia-Pacific region as well.

Under the Centre's asset monetisation plan, 13 sectors—including roads, railways, power transmission, aviation and ports—have been identified (see *What's on the Menu*) in which assets will be leased out to the private sector. These will be given out via a competitive bidding process, with the government remaining the owner. The NMP aims to monetise about Rs 1.6 lakh crore worth of projects in roads, Rs 1.5 lakh crore in railways, Rs 45,000 crore in power transmission, Rs 40,000 crore in power generation and so on. It includes 27,000 km of roads, 25 airports and 21 million tonnes of warehousing assets, among other assets.

The government is offering only brownfield projects—those that are already up and running. "The NMP [relates only to] projects where investments have already been made, where there is a completed asset which is either languishing, is not fully monetised or is under-utilised," Sitharaman said. "By bringing in private participation, we will be able to monetise [these] better and ensure further investment in infrastructure." Nilesh Shah, MD of Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company, says the NMP is a "game changer", although he stresses that execution is crucial, saying, "one has to learn from the failures in disinvestment."

Asset monetisation is not a new concept, having already been implemented by previous governments, and by the current one as well, in a limited way. In 2018, global financial conglomerate Macquarie won the right to operate nine stretches of roads under the NHAI (National Highways Authority of India) under a toll-operate-transfer (TOT) model, with a bid of Rs 9,681.5 crore. Last year, IRB Infrastructure Developers, which operated the Mumbai-Pune expressway for 15 years after winning toll rights in 2004, bagged the rights to collect toll for 30 years under the TOT model, paying the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation Rs 6,500 crore. In March, the Union road transport and highways minister Nitin Gadkari said the NHAI plans to raise

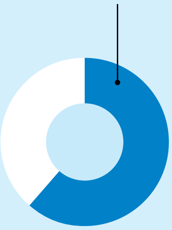
Graphics by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

FALLING SHORT

THE MODI GOVERNMENT HAS REPEATEDLY MISSED ITS AMBITIOUS DISINVESTMENT TARGETS BETWEEN 2014-15 AND 2020-21

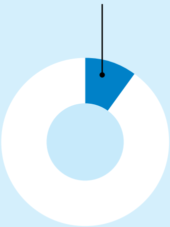
₹6.57 LAKH CRORE
What the Modi government hoped to raise between 2014-15 and 2020-21

₹4.04 LAKH CRORE
What the Modi government was able to achieve



₹2.1 LAKH CRORE
What the Centre hopes to raise through disinvestment in 2020-21 alone

₹21,000 CRORE
What it managed to raise so far this fiscal year



> **"The NMP is a game-changer, but one has to learn from the failures in disinvestment"**
>
> **– NILESH SHAH**
> *MD, Kotak Mahindra Asset Management Company*

Rs 1 lakh crore under the TOT model over the next five years. Similarly, many airports have found success in monetising existing assets.

Where the Modi government's plan breaks new ground is in its scale. The identified sectors span 12 ministries and departments and include assets from 20 categories. "The monetisation plan seems to be rather ambitious, and will have to be pushed hard to be successful," says D.K. Joshi, chief economist with Crisil. It nonetheless appears an attractive option. First, investors get to sidestep many of the financial risks of infrastructure projects, such as construction delays, while the government avoids the charge that it is selling off India's assets. "This seems to be a more palatable solution [compared to privatisation]," says Joshi. Second, since these assets already exist, the private sector only has to manage them efficiently, while the government gets money to build more infrastructure. The government has already announced several ambitious goals, from the National Infrastructure Pipeline (NIP)—Rs 111 lakh crore of expenditure by 2024-25—to the PM Gati Shakti project, an infrastructure plan announced by PM Modi on August 15 that reportedly involves Rs 100 lakh crore of spending. "We need to see how the government [plans to] pull this off. The past experience doesn't seem very encouraging," says Joshi. The Centre expects to raise 14 per cent of the outlay for the NIP through asset monetisation. It is also creating a development finance institution to fund long-term infrastructure projects, with Rs 20,000 crore of initial capital.

The Centre has also earmarked Rs 5,000 crore to incentivise states to divest their stakes in PSUs. If a state fully divests its stake, the Centre will match the divestment value; if a state lists a PSU on the stock markets, the Centre will give it 50 per cent of the amount raised; if a state monetises an asset, it will receive 33 per cent of the amount raised.

There are several different models in the works for the monetisation of assets. These include the TOT model, OMT (operate-maintain-transfer) concessions and infrastructure/ real estate investment trusts. The NITI Aayog says the model used will depend on the asset, the target investors, the scope of the project and the extent of risk-sharing. The plan will be implemented with structured partnerships under defined contractual frameworks, with clear performance standards. The implementation roadmap laid out by the NITI Aayog includes yearly targets for ministries, the on-boarding of advisors and the streamlining of approvals through 'alternative/ empowered' mechanisms.

A senior executive with an investment firm keenly interested in the NMP programme says there is a lot of interest in roads and railways projects. Roads, railways and power together make up about 65 per cent of the total NMP; how the programme progresses in these three sectors is likely to set the trend for other sectors as well. While there is some understanding of how things are likely to work out when it comes to airports and roads, railways is a fairly new animal. There are also questions on how profit-seeking will be balanced against the public good.

"A major question is how much appetite there is for such assets," says Madan Sabnavis, chief economist with Care Ratings. "Moreover, in cases where the asset is owned by a PSU, the revenue goes to the PSU, not the government." Nonetheless, some say the move is conceptually exciting. They point to the massive funding available in the IPO (initial public offering) market, and say investors like insurance companies and pension funds are looking for long-term investments that give them steady annual returns. Another reason for hope is the massive funding currently available in global financing markets. Former minister of state for finance Jayant Sinha points out that there is currently an $18 trillion glut in global financing markets. In this scenario, Indian corporates have the option of taking this funding onto their books as debt and deploying it into low-risk NMP projects. "There is no dearth of liquidity in the market," says a top official at the RBI (Reserve Bank of India). "All financial institutions want viable projects; the NMP will provide these."

To the ruling BJP's relief, its asset monetisation plans have found support from its ideological parent, the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh). Many in the RSS-affiliated Swadeshi Jagran Manch (SJM) say the government must ensure that the asset monetisation process is transparent, fair, and the correct valuation is achieved. The SJM had opposed privatisation bids during both the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime and Modi 1.0. Top RSS leaders explain they are not opposed to private capital in the public sector—their opposition is to the strategic sale of public sector enterprises. "That stand continues," says a leader. Ashwani Mahajan, national co-convenor of the SJM, says private sector firms should be welcomed if they are looking to invest in public assets but that strategic sales are "a bad proposition both politically and business-wise".

India's infrastructure deficit—from congested roads and ports and slow train services to inadequate hospitals—heavily constrains economic growth and job creation. Low productivity, poor competitiveness, high costs and the slow pace of urbanisation are some of the consequences, says the Kelkar committee report. This is where teaming up with the private sector becomes crucial. However, India's record when it comes to the public and private sectors working together is mixed at best.

The PPP model emerged as a

THE CENTRE'S CURRENT DISINVESTMENT GOALS

AIR INDIA

The Centre's deadline for the submission of financial bids is September 15; the Tata Group and SpiceJet are reportedly in the race

FIRMS IN THE DISINVESTMENT PIPELINE FOR 2021-22

- Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd
- Bharat Earth Movers Ltd
- Shipping Corporation of India
- Container Corporation of India
- IDBI Bank
- Pawan Hans
- Neelachal Ispat Nigam Ltd

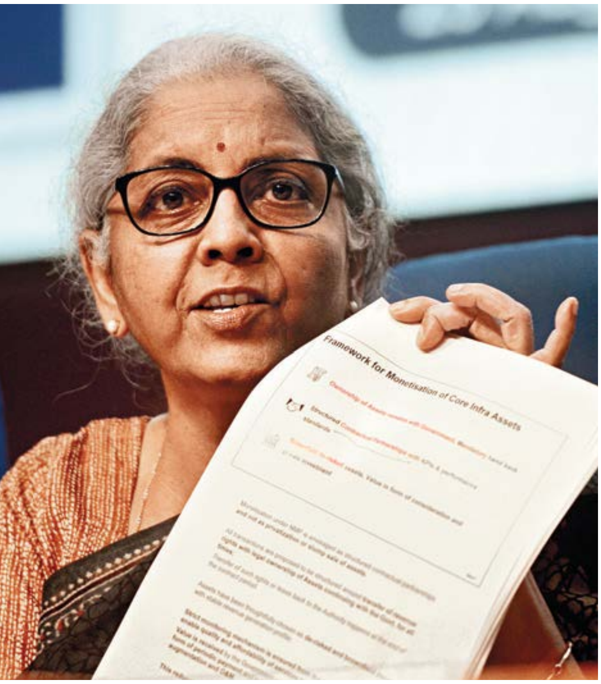
In addition to these, the government has proposed privatising two public sector banks and one general insurance company in 2021-22

GOING PUBLIC:

The Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) is planning an initial public offering of 5-10 per cent of its shares this fiscal year, and is in the process of appointing an investment banker for this purpose

- The Centre plans to divest 10-20 per cent of its stakes in National Fertilisers, Mishra Dhatu Nigam and Rashtriya Chemicals & Fertilisers

Source: Govt data, Media reports


Framework for Monetisation of Core Infra Assets

CHANDRADEEP KUMAR

> **"By bringing in private participation, we will be able to monetise assets better and ensure further investment in infrastructure building"**
>
> **– NIRMALA SITHARAMAN**
> *Union finance minister*

favoured model for development in the first decade of the 21st century. In India, there was a surge in the number of infrastructure projects implemented through PPPs during its 11th Five Year Plan. However, many were plagued by delays in land acquisition and clearances, as well as inadequate due diligence that led to several loans becoming non-performing assets. Projects approved by one government were cancelled by the next. Basic infrastructure was not provided. In ports, for instance, the Adani Group built its own railway line to service its ports, but other developers didn't have the capacity to do so. Infrastructure companies like GMR and GVK have gone bankrupt for reasons including not being able to hike airport fees, acquire land and so on. But analysts say that this time, the risks are considerably reduced. "In infrastructure monetisation, which is largely what the NMP is all about, there are three types of risks—development risks, construction risks and operating risks," explains Vinayak Chatterjee, chairman of Feedback Infra. "A favourite among investors now is acquiring the operations of brownfield assets, because it eliminates the first two links in the risk chain."

Along with the disaster stories of the PPP era are the successes, like that of Taj Mansingh Hotel in New Delhi, which the Tata Group built into a hospitality icon over the decades, winning its lease back in 2018 in a competitive bidding round after its original lease ended. (Critics, however, cite this as a case in which a once-public asset has become near-private.) Another is of Wall Street major Blackstone, which says India is its most profitable market in terms of returns—its seed investments of $25 billion are now worth over $50 billion. These include two real estate investment trusts that own, operate or finance income-generating real estate, making it the largest owner of office real estate and a leading player in the retail and logistics space.

However, as the success of the NMP lies in its implementation, there are significant challenges to be overcome.

ASSET PRICING: This is a critical issue. How does one arrive at the actual worth of a project? Should it be valued at its current worth, or its potential future worth? Moreover, since infrastructure projects take several years to become profitable, there needs to be flexibility in the longevity of asset monetisation contracts to make such projects attractive to investors. The NITI Aayog has proposed a number of ways to value projects (see *Pricing the Assets*). The manner in which these contracts are structured will also determine the

PRICING THE ASSETS

Assets can be valued in many ways. These range from comparisons with transactions of similar assets to estimates of the investment required to upgrade an asset

MARK-TO-MARKET: In this system, the value is estimated based on recent market transactions of similar assets. For instance, to put a value on a stretch of highway, one might consider the per kilometre cost in transactions for other roadways. Other factors, such as the payment terms and the bids received, also play a role.

CAPEX COST: Many assets require significant capital expenditure (capex) to improve output or profitability. In such cases, the size of the investment required becomes a reference point. The time period of this investment also plays a role, as do the contract terms, such as revenue-sharing, concession fees, premiums and others.

BOOK VALUE: This method is used when data on comparable market transactions or estimated capital investments is not available. This valuation also considers the average investment required to construct a similar asset, adjusted for the age of the existing asset, how long it has been in operation, etc.

ENTERPRISE VALUE: This approach is used when there is data on an asset's existing revenue streams, or when this can be estimated based on prevailing tariffs/ other assumptions. The net present value of discounted cashflows is estimated to arrive at a monetisation value. Again, this is just an indicative figure.

Source: Niti Aayog

PPP PROJECTS IN INFRASTRUCTURE

India's tryst with public private partnerships isn't new

PROJECTS CLOSED# 1,115

TOTAL INVESTMENT# ₹20 L. CR

LARGEST PROJECTS

PROJECT	YEAR	INVESTMENT*
Mundra Ultra Mega Power Plant	2008	31,080
Sasan Ultra Mega Power Plant	2009	29,495
Jindal Tamnar Power Plant Phase I & II	2007	29,471
Mundra Thermal Power Project	2006	29,371
Krishnapatnam Ultra Mega power plant	2010	28,312
L&T Hyderabad Metro Rail Private Ltd	2011	26,932
KSK Mahanadi Power Co. Ltd	2010	26,161
GMR Kishangarh Udaipur Ahmedabad Expressway Ltd	2012	25,016
NTPC Ltd	2004	22,170
Lalitpur Power Generation Company Ltd	2011	18,653

*#Since 1990; *Figures in Rs crore; Source: PPP Knowledge Lab*

value—for instance, the government could make investment in stadiums more attractive by allowing them to be used for congregations other than sporting events. There also needs to be clarity on whether there will be an independent regulator—the last thing an investor needs is a 'command and control' environment or an overnight change in the policy environment. The entire mechanism has to be transparent and visibly remunerative.

PAST FAILURES: The government has repeatedly failed to hit its targets in a related effort—disinvestment. Between 2014-15 and 2020-21, the Modi government aimed at raising Rs 6.57 lakh crore through this process, but managed Rs 4.04 lakh crore, about 60 per cent of that. In 2020-21, while the Centre hoped to raise Rs 2.1 lakh crore, it managed only Rs 21,000 crore, despite the stock markets being buoyant for much of the latter part of the fiscal. For 2021-22, the Centre has targeted raising Rs 1.75 lakh crore from PSU disinvestment and asset monetisation, but hardly any assets have been privatised yet. The divestment of firms such as BPCL, Air India, Shipping Corporation of India and Container Corporation of India are yet to fructify. The government also proposed privatising two public sector banks and one general insurance company in 2021-22, but progress has been slow so far. Given this history, there are concerns that asset monetisation could end up the same way.

"Asset monetisation will have a multiplier effect on growth and employment"

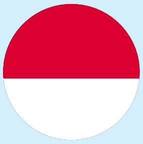
– AMITABH KANT
CEO, NITI Aayog

PREVENTING MONOPOLIES: Many worry that asset monetisation could create monopolies, leading to cronyism. The fact that most recent airport auctions were won by a single operator—the Adani Group—has only strengthened this argument. (The Adani Group is the single largest operator of airports in India, managing seven.) However, Amitabh Kant, CEO of the NITI Aayog, says the NMP process will be transparent. "All this is subject to a transparent competitive bidding process," he says. Chatterjee is of the view that if there are worries about transparency and fair play, they should be examined by regulators such as the Competition Commission of India. Clauses can be built into contracts to prevent monopolies. For instance, if six projects in a given sector are to be monetised, a clause could be inserted to ban a single bidder from winning the rights to more than one or two projects.

PREDICTABILITY AND DUE DILIGENCE: "Broadly, I am in support of the philosophy of releasing government assets to the private sector," says Prof. N.R. Bhanumurthy, vice chancellor of the Dr B.R. Ambedkar School of Economics University in Bengaluru. "The NMP will address the efficiency issue which the public sector failed vis-a-vis the private sector." Lessons need to be learned from the recent effort to privatise train routes on the Indian railway network. Although there were at first a dozen contenders, only two submitted bids—the absence of a regulator, the

HOW SOME COUNTRIES MONETISED THEIR ASSETS

AUSTRALIA: In its 2014-15 budget, the Australian government announced an Infrastructure Growth Package, a 10-year plan to boost infrastructure investment. One key component was an Asset Recycling Initiative (ARI), aimed at encouraging states to recycle assets and utilise the proceeds for new infrastructure by encouraging private companies to fund and run public infrastructure. By 2018, 12 major public assets were rolled out under the ARI. Around AU$3 billion in incentive payments were paid to participating states and territories. This helped in unlocking over AU$17 billion in new infrastructure development across Australia.



INDONESIA: In February 2020, Indonesia implemented its Limited Concession Rights scheme, a system for financing public infrastructure by using existing public assets. Under this, private firms will be invited to operate, maintain and expand existing public assets in return for an upfront concession fee or revenue sharing with the government. The revenue generated will enable the government to complete its massive infrastructure programme, including projects like the Trans-Sumatra Highway and social infrastructure projects in less developed regions.

THE UNITED STATES: In 2005-06, the 157-mile Indiana East West Toll Road connecting the Chicago Skyway to the Ohio Turnpike was monetised in order to fund a 10-year plan for building and fixing roads throughout the state. The project was structured as a 75-year concession for managing and operating the road and collecting tolls from motorists, against an upfront consideration. The road remains owned by the state.

payment of haulage (transportation) charges in addition to revenue-sharing and curbs on route flexibility were some reasons that kept bidders away.

CUTTING RED TAPE: Asset values can be eroded if investors are forced to spend years getting necessary clearances. Assets might also need to be broken up to attract interest—an investment banker says the divestment of BPCL has been slow because investors who might only be interested in the firm's refinery business could be unwilling to take on the company's massive real estate assets. Dispute resolution mechanisms could be another challenge—India has a lot of work to do in contract enforcement. Similarly, tariffs are regulated in the power sector, which could dampen investor interest. Shah suggests setting up a company like the Singapore-headquartered Temasek Holdings to manage the NMP. Others say India will require huge intellectual capital for the NMP to succeed, due to the scale of the effort. Former finance minister Arun Jaitley, in his July 2014 budget, had announced the setting up of a PPP think-tank—3P India—with a corpus of Rs 500 crore. This has yet to happen.

ASSET DEPRECIATION: Another concern relates to ensuring that the assets that are returned to the government are as valuable as when they are leased out. "When the finance minister says we are owners and the assets will be returned to us, what asset is she talking about and in what form? It will be completely depreciated," former Union minister and Congress leader P. Chidambaram said in an interview. He has proposed that depreciation of assets go into depreciation reserves, used to keep the asset in good shape.

NARROW VIEW OF PUBLIC ASSETS: Vikram Singh Mehta, former chairman of Shell India, says he is concerned that the NMP model looks at public utility assets through a narrow lens—finance—which underrates their potential contribution to public welfare. According to the NITI Aayog, what determines whether a public asset is a candidate for monetisation is whether it is active and revenue-generating with potential for improved utilisation—if so, it can be considered for monetisation. 'My concern is that the model seemingly absolves the government of the responsibility of unlocking the intrinsic social value of these assets,' Mehta wrote in a media article on September 6. However, Kant says the Centre has set up a PPP cell with advisors from the private sector who are working with the government to execute the NMP. Projects will be closely monitored, with yearly targets, he adds. This is also expected to balance the government's monetisation goals with its welfare targets.

Overall, the asset monetisation plan is a giant call by the Centre to reach out to the private sector. If well executed, this could have a multiplier effect on the Indian economy. Given the circumstances that the government is in today, it has few other options left, making success in this effort crucial. ■

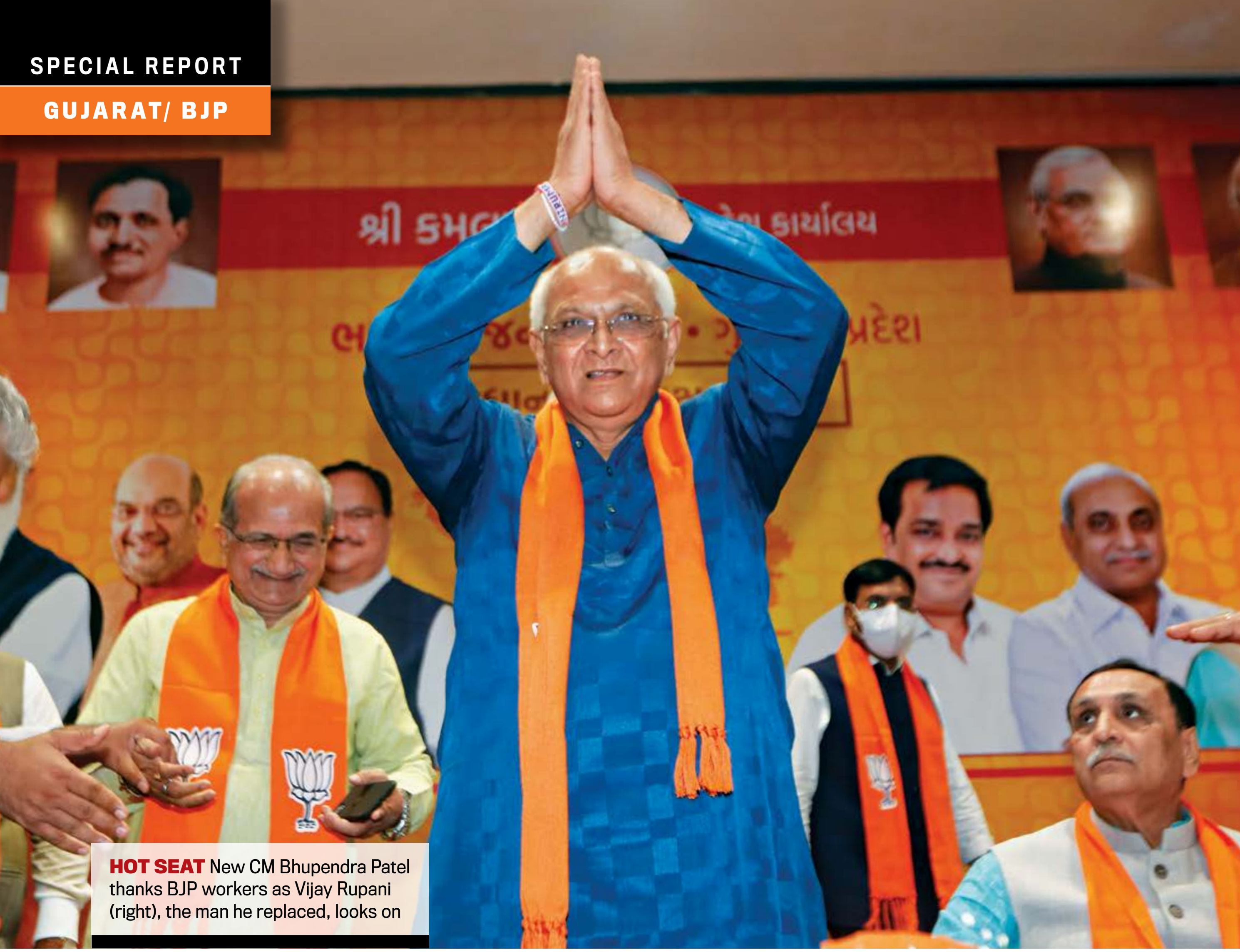
—with Anilesh S. Mahajan

IQ ✓ EQ ✓ HQ ?

TO KNOW MORE, WATCH THIS SPACE

LAUNCHING 24TH SEPTEMBER 2021

INDIA TODAY
RPG
INITIATIVE



HOT SEAT New CM Bhupendra Patel thanks BJP workers as Vijay Rupani (right), the man he replaced, looks on

NANDAN DAVE

GAMEPLAN GUJARAT

The change of guard at the top had two primary objectives: **winning over the Patidars and tackling disaffection in the BJP ranks.** Can new chief minister Bhupendra Patel keep the BJP's ranks together until the election in 2022?

BY KIRAN D. TARE IN AHMEDABAD

CHALLENGING TASK

A first-time MLA, Bhupendra Patel faces an uphill task in revving up the administration before the election. Among his challenges:

MONSOON FURY
Intense rain battered the Saurashtra region last week. A relief package must be announced pronto

PENDING WORK
Finance and revenue have been the most ineffective departments. Close to 600 files are pending in these departments

DEMORALISED CADRE
The BJP cadre are demoralised because of the bureaucratic hurdles in meeting and connecting with ex-CM Rupani

UPSET PATIDARS
The influential Patidar community is upset with the BJP after it sidestepped their demand for reservation

VETERAN ANGST
Bhupendra Patel was elevated bypassing several seniors in the party. The pressure will be on from day one

The mood at the Gujarat BJP headquarters ‘Kamalam’ in Gandhinagar was sombre on September 12, with party legislators gathered there to ‘elect’ their new leader after the sudden resignation of Chief Minister Vijay Rupani the day before. At around 4 pm, when central observer Narendra Tomar announced Bhupendra Patel as Rupani’s successor, everyone was scrambling to find the low-key legislator. BJP workers took almost five minutes to find Patel, who was sitting all by himself in a corner of the hall. When he reached the dais, Bhupendra was first greeted by Rupani. When Tomar asked him to say something to the legislators, the new CM was too overwhelmed to say much. He thanked everyone profusely and sat down.

The elevation of Bhupendra Patel, 59, a part-time RSS worker and a first-time MLA, to the top post marks yet another shift in the functioning of the BJP in Gujarat. A former chairman of the Ahmedabad Urban Development Authority (AUDA), his fortunes changed after former Gujarat chief minister (2014-16) and current Uttar Pradesh governor Anandiben Patel picked him for a bigger role in politics. The engineer-turned-builder politician was chairman of the Thaltej municipal council till 2010 when the area was merged with the Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC). In an unprecedented situation, after his maiden election to the AMC in 2010, he was made chairman of its standing committee.

His stain-free stint at the AMC fetched him the post of AUDA chairman in 2015. Two years later, Anandiben chose him as her successor from the Ghatlodia assembly constituency in Ahmedabad as she moved to Bhopal as governor of Madhya Pradesh. Bhupendra Patel won the seat by 117,000 votes, the highest victory margin in the 2017 state election.

Residents of the Dariyapur and Ghatlodia areas know him as an ordinary Sangh swayamsevak, who makes it a point to attend all six ‘*utsavs*’ (important functions) through the year. “Bhupendrabhai is a very simple man,” says Darshan Solanki, a businessman. “When I would bump into him at the AMC and casually ask, ‘*Kem chho kaka*? (How are you, uncle?)’, he would reply, ‘*Maja ma* (I am well)’. He doesn’t have any airs and is always courteous, even with strangers.”

It’s this non-controversial background and a talent for befriending relative strangers that have helped Bhupendra Patel emerge as Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s choice for chief minister. According to a senior state BJP leader, what the party needed right now was someone who could take everyone along and infuse confidence in the cadre. “The cadre was feeling dejected with Vijaybhai (Rupani),” says the leader. “He was a non-controversial administrator and is a very nice human being...but had lost connect with the cadre as he was too dependent on the bureaucracy.”

The BJP leadership briefly considered deputy chief minister Nitin Patel, a heavyweight Patidar leader, for the post. However, they realised that he could prove to be a liability. “Had Nitinbhai been made the CM, the Thakors and the Choudharys in north Gujarat would have gone against the BJP, considering his rivalry with these communities,” the state leader says. “We are not in a position to upset them.”

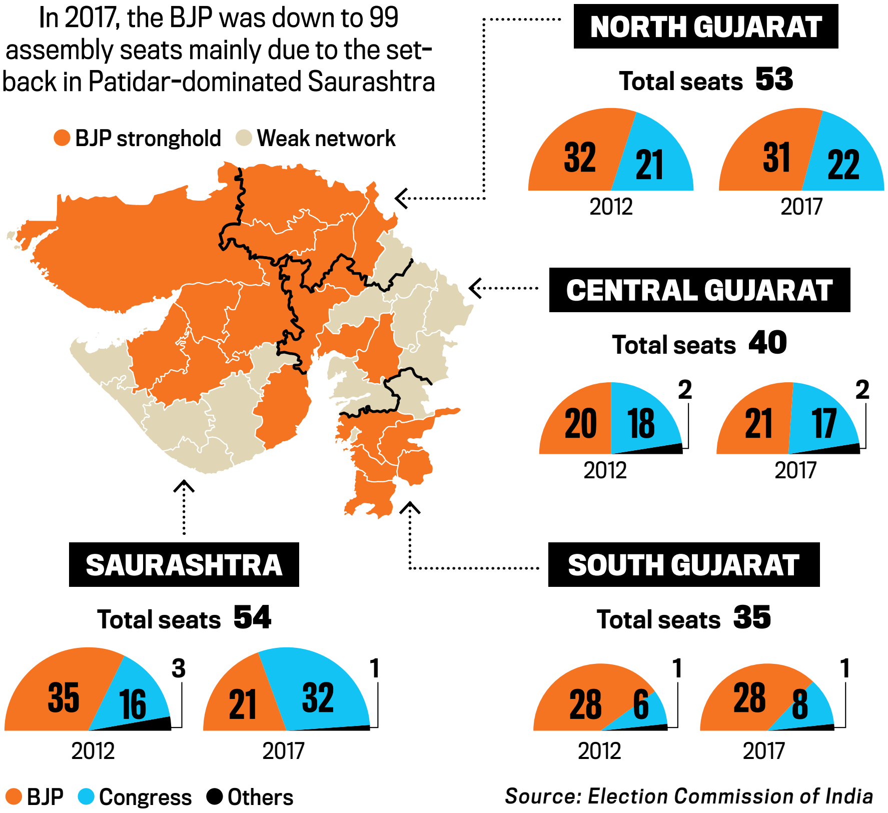
TARGET PATIDAR

With an 18 per cent share of the population, the Patidar community has the potential to influence the poll outcome in three of the four regions of Gujarat. Once restricted to farming, they are now leaders in trade and business too. The community had drifted away from the BJP in 2017 when the party appeared unresponsive to their demand for reservation. It cost the BJP at least seven seats. The BJP managed to win the 2017 election with its lowest tally of 99 seats only by engineering a divide in the traditional Congress vote in almost 47 constituencies.

Bhupendra Patel, who comes from the Kadva Patel section of the Patidars, will have to work hard to get the community onboard again for the BJP. His close association with several Patidar organisations could be an advantage. A source in the state government says the new CM is likely to replace the Kshatriya heads in many police stations with Patidars as a

LOSING ITS EDGE

In 2017, the BJP was down to 99 assembly seats mainly due to the setback in Patidar-dominated Saurashtra

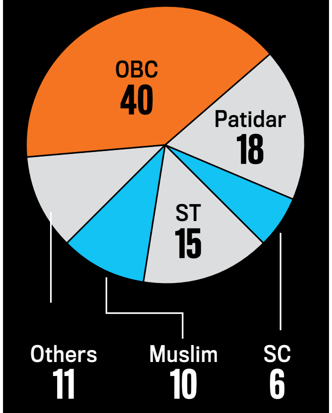


Source: Election Commission of India

CASTE FACTOR

While the OBCs are traditional BJP supporters, the Muslims and SCs have stood faithfully by the Congress

(Population in per cent)



Source: Census 2001

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

first step in the reconciliation process. In Gujarat, the junior home minister is usually from the Patidar community. Of the three deputy home ministers Narendra Modi had as chief minister between 2001 and 2014, two—Gordhan Zadafia and Praful K. Patel—were Patidar. The feeling in the state BJP is that the Patidars were neglected in the police force under current junior home minister Pradeepsinh Jadeja, a Kshatriya, in the past five years. To avoid a backlash from the Kshatriya community, Jadeja could be elevated to the rank of cabinet minister and another Kshatriya, Bhupendrasinh Chudasama, the seniormost minister, could be made Speaker of the assembly, the second most important post after the chief minister.

The BJP's Patidar outreach is also a reaction to the expansion of the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Gujarat. AAP made headlines in February after winning 25 seats in the Surat Municipal Corporation, with support from the Patidar Andolan Samiti (PAS). The Congress got zero seats. The PAS had backed AAP to teach the BJP a lesson. However, the Congress became the unintended victim. The BJP did retain Surat but the move finished off the Congress in the diamond city.

Hardik Patel, who spearheaded the Patidar reservation agitation, is the Congress state working president now. Political observers believe the strategy to project Bhupendra Patel as an accommodative Patidar could dent the Congress further. Hardik does not buy this theory. "The BJP is losing ground rapidly," he told reporters on September 11. "If an election is held now, the Congress will cross the 100-seat mark and the BJP will be reduced to less than 40 seats." State BJP spokesperson Yamal Vyas laughs at the idea: "Bhupendrabhai is a well-educated, clean leader. We have not gambled with him."

In 2017, the BJP had won 99 seats to the Congress's 77. In the past four years, the BJP has increased its strength to 111 by poaching 12 Congress MLAs. The central Gujarat region, which elects 40 MLAs, has been the BJP's weakest point. The Kshatriyas, SCs and Muslims have always supported the Congress here. While the BJP has got a promising Patidar leader now, it's still struggling to get reliable Kshatriya, SC and Muslim faces. "These communities have kept the Congress alive in Gujarat," says a senior BJP leader. "They get at least 40 seats for the Congress. That is our biggest worry at present."

Political analyst Shirish Kashikar says Bhupendra Patel's main challenge will be to keep the BJP flock together, especially his ambitious cabinet colleagues. He needs to prove that he is an efficient taskmaster. "He knows the nitty-gritty of the party cadre but lacks the pan-Gujarat appeal of, say, Rupani or Nitin Patel. If the BJP cadre support him through the rest of the term, he might be able to get the BJP back in power again. As of now, it seems an uphill task." ■

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A WILD WIND FROM WESTERN UP

AS THE REGION'S JATS AND MUSLIMS UNITE AGAINST THE CENTRE'S FARM POLICIES, THEY POSE A CHALLENGE TO THE RULING BJP'S PROSPECTS AHEAD OF THE 2022 UP ELECTION

By Ashish Misra

It was Muzaffarnagar that turned the tide in favour of the BJP in Uttar Pradesh in the 2017 assembly election. And it may well be Muzaffarnagar that will prove to be the party's nemesis in 2022.

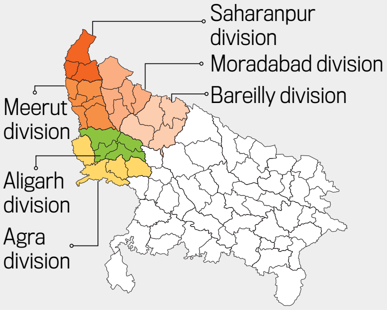
On September 5, 150,000 farmers from 13 states, including UP, gathered at the Government Intermediate College (GIC) grounds for a mahapanchayat under the aegis of the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM), while another 150,000 spilled out on the streets of Muzaffarnagar. On the stage were representatives of 40 farmer organisations, as 1,000 LED screens beamed the proceedings live.

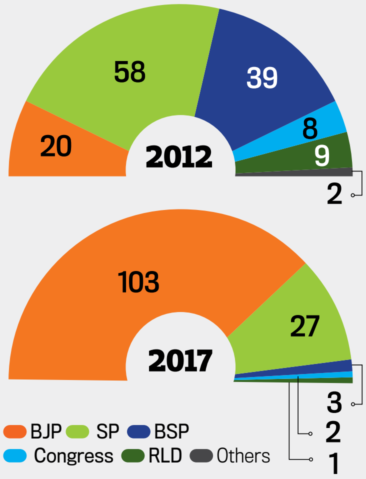
If the BJP thought the farmers' protests would die a natural death, the six-hour-long mahapanchayat should come as a rude wake-up call. When Rakesh Tikait, national spokesperson of the Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) and the most prominent face of the agitation, took the stage to launch 'Mission UP', urging farmers to expel 'outsiders' Yogi Adityanath and Narendra Modi; or when he called for a Bharat Bandh on September 27; or articulated one more time the farmers' demand to withdraw the three new farm laws and write into law the guarantee of an MSP (minimum support price), it might have all sounded like echoes of a voice heard earlier. It was his concluding statement that marked a new register in this ongoing protest: "Now, we will not let the BJP start another riot," he declared. "If they divide the people, we will unite them. Now, as before, the slogans of '*Allah Hu Akbar*' and '*Har Har Mahadev*' will resonate from the farmers' platform."

A subtle shift is under way in western UP, and nowhere is this more evident than in Muzaffarnagar, the site of bloody communal riots in 2013. That violence marked the end of a Jat-Muslim unity forged out of longstanding economic hardship and ethnic ties, with the BJP benefitting from the communally charged environment in the 2017 state election. As the Jats and Muslims come together again to make common cause against the Centre's new farm laws, it appears the farmers are not merely fighting to safeguard their economic interests, they also want to make the BJP pay a political price for stonewalling their demands.

It certainly cannot be good news for the BJP or the Yogi Adityanath government six months ahead of the assembly poll in UP. As Harish Tyagi, the Muzaffarnagar district convenor of the All India Kisan Khet Mazdoor Sangathan, predicts, "There will be a big drop in BJP seats from western UP in 2022." Western UP has 136 assembly seats, of which the BJP currently holds 103; it also holds 20 of 27 Lok Sabha seats from this part of the state. Going by the 1931 caste census (the last time such an exercise was conducted), 99 per cent of the state's Jat population is

BJP'S ELECTORAL TRAJECTORY IN WESTERN UP





Source: Election Commission. There are a total of 136 assembly seats in the 26 districts of the Saharanpur, Meerut, Agra, Moradabad, Aligarh, Bareilly divisions of western UP

Graphic by ASIT ROY

संयुक्त किसान मोर्चा

CALL FOR UNITY Rakesh Tikait at the Muzaffarnagar mahapanchayat, Sept. 5

MANEESH AGNIHOTRI

concentrated in six mandals of western UP. And while Jats constitute 3.6 per cent of UP's backward classes, they account for 18-20 per cent in these six mandals, according to a 2001 report of the Social Justice Committee. Again, 49 out of western UP's 136 assembly seats have a Muslim population of 30 per cent or more. In 25 seats, Jats and Muslims form more than half the population.

It is these Jats and Muslims whom the BKU is now seeking to unite. National president Naresh Tikait and national spokesperson Rakesh Tikait are enlisting the support of the khap panchayats of the Jats; Naresh, who belongs to the Baliyan khap, is, in fact, the head of the Sarvakhap panchayat, a collective of all the khaps of UP. The September 5 kisan mahapanchayat was supported by all the major khaps of western UP. The Gathwala khap, which had stayed away from the farmers' movement, was won over when its *thanbedar* (head) Shyam Singh was entrusted with the responsibility of presiding over the mahapanchayat.

Simultaneously, the BKU is activating the organisation from the state to the village level. Rajveer Singh Jadaun has been made state president. He has been given four vice-presidents to assist him. A president has been appointed for every mandal, district, block and village. The contours of the wider movement are decided on the basis of feedback from village committee meetings.

However, while all this may help the BKU successfully mobilise an anti-BJP vote, how does it propose to persuade its supporters to elect parties other than the BJP, especially given that it has so far kept away from all of them?

On their part, all anti-BJP parties have pledged support to the farmers' cause. Congratulating farmers a day after the mahapanchayat, Samajwadi Party leader and former UP chief minister Akhilesh Yadav said the BJP should show respect for the farmers' struggles and repeal the farm laws. Bahujan Samaj Party leader Mayawati lauded the spirit of Hindu-Muslim unity at the mahapanchayat while Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra castigated the "arrogance of the government". Rashtriya Lok Dal chief Jayant Chaudhary, son of Jat icon Chaudhary Charan Singh, also said the government instead of resolving farmers' issues, has chosen to browbeat them.

The problem, as Dr Baburam Malik,

INTERVIEW

"WE'LL HAVE A FARMERS' MOVEMENT IN EVERY VILLAGE"

BKU national president Naresh Tikait outlined the strategy ahead, a day after the Muzaffarnagar kisan mahapanchayat

Q. What next after the success of Muzaffarnagar mahapanchayat?
A. The farmer in every village of UP is troubled. After the mahapanchayat, he has realised his power. Now there will be a farmers' movement in every village.

Q. Are anti-BJP forces supporting farmers to serve their own political interests?
A. The farmer is fighting his own battle. The BJP government can hold talks with Pakistan and China but not with the farmers of their country. If the government takes two steps back, the farmers too will back down half a step.

Q. Jats seem to be the most visible in the agitation. Are other agricultural castes staying away? Also, is the movement more active in western UP?
A. If Jats are in a majority in western UP, naturally, you will see more of them. There were many farmers from eastern UP at the mahapanchayat. The distance may have deterred the others.

Q. There was a lot of emphasis on Hindu-Muslim unity at the mahapanchayat.
A. When the BJP feels insecure, it instigates riots. Hindu-Muslim unity was broken after the 2013 Muzaffarnagar riots. Their anti-farmer policies have united every section of society. To break this unity, the BJP will organise riots again.

Q. At the mahapanchayat, UP chief minister Yogi Adityanath was targeted along with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
A. We voted for Yogiji along with Modiji. This does not mean we will tolerate his anti-farmer policies. We respect Yogiji. He should have a discussion with farmers and find a solution to their problems.

Q. Will BKU contest the 2022 poll?
A. Farmers are free to vote for other parties against the BJP at their discretion.

WOOING JATS PM Modi, UP CM Yogi Adityanath in Aligarh, Sept. 14

ANI

WHY FARMERS ARE ANGRY

No fair price for produce: Corruption in government procurement process of the crop due to big farmers-officials nexus. Small farmers compelled to sell crop in open market at prices lower than MSP

Rising cost of power: Electricity rates in rural areas have increased by 40 per cent in the past four years. In 2017, cost of electricity went up from Rs 900 a month to Rs 1,850 a month for running a 10 HP tubewell. Non-payment attracted surcharge and penalty. All this has added to crop cost. Farmers have also received arbitrary power bills

Dissatisfaction over land compensation: With their land being procured for large-scale development works in UP, farmers in many districts, including Shamli, Ghaziabad, Bulandshahr and Bareilly, are protesting and alleging less than the prescribed land compensation

Irregularities in Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana: Some 750,000 people in UP, who are not small or marginal farmers, are alleged to have availed of the scheme's benefits. The state government has ordered that such people be identified and action taken against them.

Denial of crop insurance: Farmers of two dozen flood-prone districts of UP allege that surveys conducted to assess crop damage show only half the loss to deny them the benefit of crop insurance

DAMAGE CONTROL BY YOGI GOVERNMENT

Withdrawal of cases: In what could provide relief to more than 10,000 farmers in western UP, the chief minister has ordered the withdrawal of cases registered for burning of crop stubble

OTS scheme: A one-time settlement (OTS) scheme for interest subvention on old power bills will be implemented. Power connections will not be cut even is a bill is outstanding

Special grant: UP farmers will be given a grant of Rs 250 per quintal on paddy and Rs 400 per quintal on wheat seeds. This proposal was approved in a cabinet meeting held on August 16 under the chief minister's chairmanship

Modern mandis: 27 modern mandis are in the works so that farmers get a fair price for their produce. In the past four years, 20 agriculture centres have been set up along with 220 new agriculture marketplaces

Farm machinery bank: Cooperative societies and village panchayats will get grants for setting up farm machinery banks. The grant by the agriculture department will cover 80 per cent of the fixed price up to Rs 5 lakh for the purchase of agriculture machinery

Solar pumps: To promote the use of solar pumps as an alternative to electricity- and diesel-based irrigation, farmers will be given a 40-70 per cent subsidy on the fixed price of solar pumps

who has been running a clinic for the past 43 years in the Jat-dominated Sisauli town of Muzaffarnagar, points out, is that "the anti-BJP parties in UP are not active on the ground", making BKU the chief opponent of the BJP's farm policies. Not only that, the BKU, says Dr Kalam Singh, former head of the sociology department at DAV College, Muzaffarnagar, "will have to integrate forward castes like Tyagi with the backward Saini, Kashyap and Gurjar castes, besides uniting Jats and Muslims to make the farmers' movement effective in western UP. By joining the forward castes, these backward castes can make a difference in 60 assembly seats in western UP. In 2017, these small castes had rallied in favour of the BJP."

Aware of the shifting ground, the BJP has begun damage control. On September 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone of a state university in Aligarh named after Jat king Raja Mahendra Pratap Singh. He also used the occasion to invoke other Jat leaders such as Chotu Ram and Charan Singh, saying how the latter, too, cared for the small farmer. The PM said all the Centre's efforts, be it MSP, kisan credit cards, crop insurance or pension scheme, are directed at empowering small farmers. By focusing on the small farmer, the BJP is trying to engineer another split in the farmers' movement and rob it of its ballast.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, too, has been meeting with farmers' bodies every month to assess their grievances. He has also withdrawn the cases filed against the farmers arrested for burning stubble. The Yogi government also says it is implementing development schemes worth more than Rs 10,000 crore in western UP. "These development plans," says state BJP minister and Saharanpur district in-charge Chandramohan, "have been made keeping farmers in mind."

The Adityanath government is also contemplating an increase in sugarcane prices, which UP's 4.5 million sugarcane farmers have been demanding for the past three years. The state advisory price of sugarcane was increased only once, that too by Rs 10, after the BJP came to power in UP in 2017. It may be time to sweeten the deal again. ■

SHOULDER TO SHOULDER CM Nitish Kumar with his deputies Tarkishore Prasad and Renu Devi at a welfare programme launch in Patna

ANI

THE STATES | BJP IN BIHAR

BIG BROTHER'S SHADOW

AN UPBEAT BJP HAS AN 'ATMANIRBHAR' PLAN FOR THE 2025 BIHAR ASSEMBLY POLL. THE TWO CURRENT DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTERS ARE SETTING THE STAGE FOR THIS

By Amitabh Srivastava

Tarkishore Prasad picks up the phone receiver and says, "DM *saheb*, I am sending someone to see you. Do solve his problem and report back when it is done." Then, for the benefit of those within earshot, the otherwise soft-spoken Tarkishore *bhaiyya* makes a point of adding: "*Garib ki madad* priority *se honi chahiye* (the welfare of the poor must be accorded priority)...not like the old days."

That little postscript about the old days and the not-so-subtle brag about speedy redress of complaints is, of course, laden with political significance. The 65-year-old deputy chief minister (one of two from the BJP) says no more about the 'old days'. And yet nobody in the room is left in any doubt that he is showing off his party's muscle. He was also serving notice to *babus* in the state that this is no longer a solo show of Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

A general impression of the Nitish years has been that the bureaucracy only heeds the hands-on chief minister—who still controls the critical home and general administration portfolios—and a handful of powerful ministers, but given the BJP's increased strength now in the Bihar house and cabinet, the 'old days' are slowly becoming a thing of the past. Meanwhile, Tarkishore moves on to the next complainant as the harried man from one of the north Bihar districts thanks him and leaves with a chit for the DM. The deputy chief minister is at his weekly *janata darbar* on Tuesdays, and there are still over 250 people waiting for his attention.

THE TWO DEPUTY CMs

Tarkishore Prasad, a fourth-time BJP legislator from Katihar, has never lost an election. He is one of the two deputy chief ministers picked by the BJP in November 2020 after the new Vidhan Sabha was elected. The party leadership shifted veteran Sushil Modi, the former Bihar deputy chief minister, to the Rajya Sabha and installed two new deputy chief ministers in the Nitish Kumar government—a first for Bihar.

The 62-year-old Renu Devi is the other deputy chief minister. A five-term legislator and former minister (2008-10), she is a Nonia, an influential and numerically significant EBC (Extremely Backward Class) caste.

However, unlike Tarkishore, who has crucial portfolios like finance, commercial taxes and urban development and housing, Renu Devi has much less on her plate. She just has disaster management and the BC & EBC welfare department. Two heavyweight departments, panchayati raj and industry, were taken away in a subsequent cabinet expansion.

The grapevine has it that the BJP picked Renu Devi to sort of replicate the 'Nitish Kumar model' of winning over two crucial constituencies—women and the EBCs. "Renu Devi may not have a significant portfolio or much of a say in day-to-day governance, but the deputy CM tag and the fact that she sits next to the chief minister at public appearances is good enough to hammer home the message that the BJP is promoting EBC empowerment in Bihar," a senior party leader explains.

By contrast, Tarkishore, who comes from the Vaishya (trader) caste that makes up 6-7 per cent of the voters in the state, is in the thick of it, be it governance or politics. Though a first-timer in government, he presented the largest ever budget for the state in February this year. From sitting with bureaucrats for long hours to getting to know Chief Minister Nitish's mind and including his ideas in the budget, Tarkishore has been credited for stitching together many innovative ideas such as the setting up of a corporation to provide financial assistance of up to Rs 10 lakh to women entrepreneurs.

Apart from Tarkishore and Renu Devi, the BJP has also drafted in Vijay Sinha, an upper caste Bhumihar, as the party's first assembly speaker. The three leaders together represent about 20 per cent of Bihar's voters by identity.

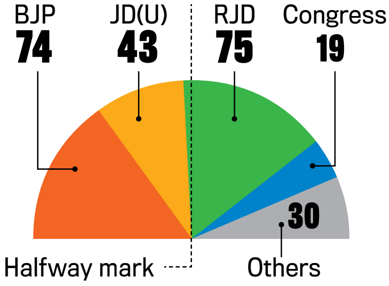
THE GUJARAT HAND

Having horses for courses is only half the BJP gameplan for Bihar, admits a senior BJP leader in Patna. "As of now, Bihar is the only major state where the BJP, despite being in government, is not leading it. The plan is to expand our base the way we have done in Uttar Pradesh and be *atmanirbhar* by the 2025 assembly poll," he says.

SONU KISHAN

CURRENT ASSEMBLY POSITION

Total assembly seats **243***



*Current strength: 241

Having given these three leaders nine months to build some goodwill for the new BJP, 'Plan Bihar' shifted to the next gear on August 18 when the central leadership para-dropped Bhikhubhai Dalsania, the erstwhile Gujarat BJP's organisational secretary, to lead the saffron push in the state.

Dalsania, a low-profile RSS *pracharak* from Jamnagar who joined the BJP in the mid-'90s, is a known confidant of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah. He has now taken over as general secretary, organisation, of the Bihar BJP. Dalsania's job is to ensure that the central leadership is in the loop in all the political affairs of the BJP in the state. A senior party leader concedes that having gained traction in the 2020 assembly election—the BJP won 74 of 110 seats it contested against 53 of 157 in 2015—the party is now bracing for another big push and Dalsania has been assigned the key role.

The BJP has already grabbed the space of principal opponent from Lalu Prasad's Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD).

ाइटी प्रकोष्ठ
य, अटल वाजपेयी स

THE NEXT BIG PUSH
BJP general secretary Bhikhubhai Dalsania with roads minister Nitin Navin

> **THE BJP KNOWS IT IS FUTILE TO CHASE THE YADAV VOTE. THE NEXT BEST OPTION: GO AFTER NITISH'S EBC-MAHADALIT BASE**

And if the RJD has a formidable vote base in Bihar, it also has opponents cutting across social levels. "This is the votebase we want to win over. The idea is to become the first and the most preferred alternative to the RJD," says a BJP leader. The inner contradiction here is that the party will be eyeing the votes of ally JD(U), so the jousting for control in the current government could get worse.

However, the other option, is to try and wean away the Yadav vote bank of the Tejashwi Yadav-led RJD, but that appears far more improbable. "It's futile to chase the Yadav vote, which has remained strongly behind Lalu Yadav's family despite the many saffron overtures. The best time to project a Yadav leader like the current Union MoS for home Nityanand Rai, was perhaps in the 2015 assembly poll, after some 25 per cent of the Yadavs had voted for the BJP in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. But we failed to do that, and Lalu further consolidated his Yadav base. Now the best strategy left is to borrow the 'Nitish model' even if it is to the disadvantage of our alliance partner," says a BJP leader in Delhi.

Over the years, if the RJD's formidable M-Y combination (the 14 per cent Yadav vote and the 16 per cent Muslim vote) has failed to stop Nitish, it is largely because the Bihar chief minister himself has a similar cohort of the EBCs and Mahadalits behind him. Nitish has always been a survivor, and it is highly unlikely that he will allow his saffron alliance partner to run away with this success script.

There's also the moral high ground to consider, which will work to the chief minister's advantage. Nitish, a product of the Ram Manohar Lohia-Jayaprakash Narayan-Karpoori Thakur school of socialism, has high currency in the state as an inclusive welfarist in contrast to the BJP's divisive Hindutva ideology. Sparks have flared off and on between the allies, with the Bihar BJP president Sanjay Jaiswal taking potshots at the government over the law and order situation. Many see it as the BJP's plan to test Nitish's patience. The latter may not have retorted, but JD(U) senior leader Upendra Kushwaha has missed no occasion to call out the ally.

All that, though, is just the sideshow; the main event for now—and the BJP's future plans in the state are crucial to this—is the performance of its two deputy chief ministers, who have been entrusted the role of image-building and consolidation in the run-up to the 2025 assembly election.

If Renu Devi serves a symbolic purpose, Tarkishore is more in the image of Sushil Modi, albeit with a Hindutva twist. He has been winning the Muslim-dominated Katihar seat continuously since 2005, though his detractors maintain that this was possible only by driving a wedge between Hindus and Muslims.

Tarkishore will know only too well that it's far from easy to simultaneously be an adversary and an understudy (of the chief minister). Sources say he has done well so far, managing to win Nitish's confidence to some degree. Indeed, when controversial JD(U) legislator Gopal Mandal last month criticised Tarkishore and asked for a probe into the deputy CM's frequent visits to Bhagalpur, alleging that it was to collect "extortion money", the JD(U) leadership promptly took the MLA to task. Senior JD(U) minister and Nitish confidant Vijay Choudhary summoned Mandal and apparently gave him a dressing down. Mandal subsequently held a press conference to withdraw his statement, express his regrets and admit how much he "loved Tarkishorji". Given the BJP's expansionist moves in Bihar, it will be interesting to see how long the party's love lasts. ■

DEFENCE | INDIGENISATION

STARTING TROUBLES

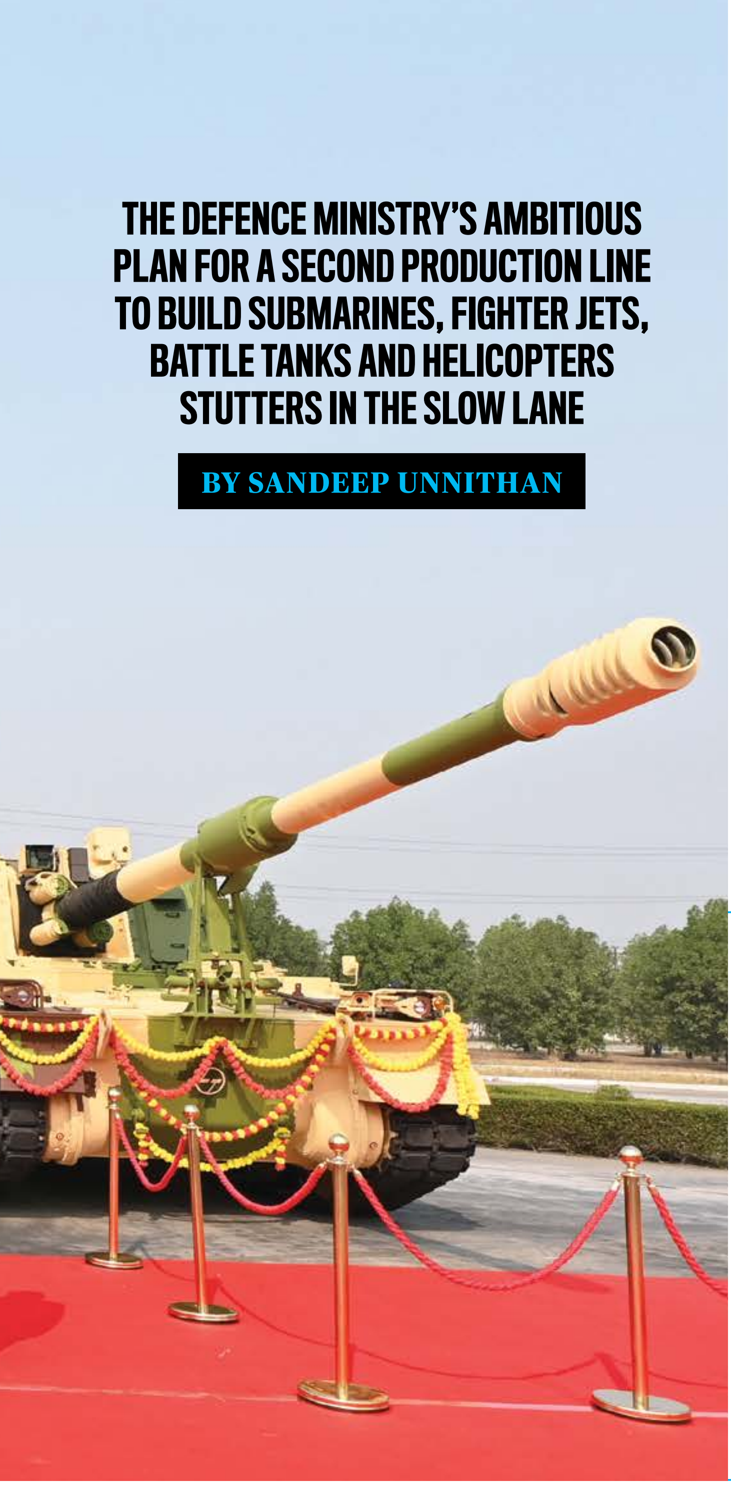
LAUNCHING PAD Chief of Army Staff Gen. M.M. Naravane (centre) flags off the 100th K-9 Vajra howitzer at the L&T facility at Hazira, Gujarat, on Feb. 18, 2021

A single defence deal is emblematic of the delays affecting India's defence modernisation plan. On September 8, the Cabinet Committee on Security cleared a Rs 20,000 crore proposal to buy 56 C295 military transport aircraft for the Indian Air Force from Airbus Industries. The deal, cleared by the Defence Acquisition Council in 2015, has been waiting for the green light for six years. After a contract is eventually inked, Airbus will assemble 40 of the 56 military transport aircraft in India with its partner, Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL).

It is a significant step because the state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) is the only Indian company that builds military aircraft. But momen-

THE DEFENCE MINISTRY'S AMBITIOUS PLAN FOR A SECOND PRODUCTION LINE TO BUILD SUBMARINES, FIGHTER JETS, BATTLE TANKS AND HELICOPTERS STUTTERS IN THE SLOW LANE

BY SANDEEP UNNITHAN



tous as this deal might be, it will not instantly spur defence indigenisation within the country—what the government calls 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', where it wants Indian defence firms to not just produce military hardware but export them as well. TASL, for instance, will not be able to build copies of the C295, upgrade it or even export it without its foreign partner because it does not own the design. The inability to break out of licensed production is a problem that has bedevilled India's defence indigenisation process. The reasons range from a dysfunctional military industrial complex dominated by the public sector and a lack of indigenous defence R&D to produce indigenous design, to patchy support for such products from the armed forces.

The result? India has the dubious distinction of being the world's second largest arms importer. Between 2016 and 2020, India accounted for 9.5 per cent of all global arms imports, bringing in fighter jets, warships and missiles from the US, Russia, France and Israel.

Over this decade, the three services will buy over $100 billion (Rs 7 lakh crore) worth of fighter jets, helicopters, tanks and submarines to upgrade their ageing hardware. To ensure that these are produced within India—to lower costs and increase local manufacturing capabilities—the government launched its Strategic Partnership (SP) model in 2017. Under this, the ministry of defence (MoD) would team up with a strategic partner—a private sector manufacturer selected after a laid down procedure—which would then partner with a foreign OEM (original eqquipment manufacturer) to seek technology transfers to set up domestic manufacturing infrastructure and supply chains, R&D for modernisation and upgrades and an ecosystem of suppliers.

In 2017, the MoD identified four of its biggest procurements, collectively worth over Rs 2.2 lakh crore, which it would hand over to the private sector. These included the navy's plan to acquire six submarines and 123 utility helicopters to operate from warships, the army's replacements for its fleet of 1,700 T-72 tanks and the air force's demand for 110 fighter jets to replace its dwindling fighter squadrons (see *Slow Burner Partnerships*).

THE INABILITY TO BREAK OUT OF LICENSED PRODUCTION IS A PROBLEM THAT HAS BEDEVILLED INDIA'S DEFENCE INDIGENISATION PROCESS

Five years on, though, this partnership model is mired in delays. Three of the four projects are still in their first stage, where a service issues RFIs or requests for information. (It takes five to seven years for a deal to go from initiation of a case to contract signing.) The navy's P75 (I) project to build submarines is the only one at stage 2—asking production partners to submit proposals. Cutting the steel for the first submarine, though, is still years away.

Another project, to build naval utility helicopters, is caught in a tailspin. Public sector HAL wants to participate in the contest, fielding a variant of its indigenously designed ALH Dhruv, but the navy wants the PSU kept out, citing the fact that SPs are meant only for the private sector. HAL has cited the precedent set by the state-owned Mazagon Docks Ltd (MDL) being in the P75 (I) submarine race to justify its inclusion. The government is believed to have pressed pause on the NUH (Naval Utility Helicopters) programme and allowed the navy to lease helicopters to tide over its shortfall.

KNOWHOW AND KNOW-WHY

As part of its Aatmanirbhar Bharat drive, the government is converting its 41 ordnance factories into defence public sector corporations, setting up defence corridors in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu to give out land to defence industries to set up manufacturing facilities. The MoD has notified a positive indigenisation list of 209 items, from warships to howitzers, and embargoed imports and assured domestic industry of orders worth Rs 4 lakh crore over the next five to seven years.

This is meant to jumpstart local manufacturing by domestic industry. The government has fixed a target of Rs 35,000 crore ($5 billion) exports each year by 2025. The SP model should have fitted right in with this policy, but the MoD now feels it could be out of sync with its ambitious indigenisation policy.

“The SP model is from a different era. It is a more advanced version of licensed production. Whereas, under Aatmanirbhar Bharat, we want companies to have the knowhow and know-why,” says a senior defence ministry official. Knowhow enables licensed production while know-why brings the capability to independently design hardware that comes when design technology is transferred. As is the case with the Airbus C295 deal, the foreign OEM will continue to be in the driver’s seat.

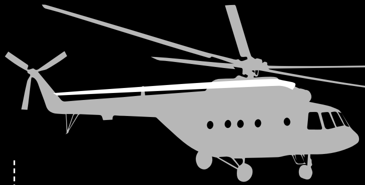
This, defence officials say, is the result of a structural flaw in the SP model. The original ‘cost plus’ model (which estimates the total cost of a product over its life cycle) recommended by several MoD-appointed committees was converted into an ‘L1’ model where the ministry gives the contract to the lowest bidder. An L1 model is, therefore, no different from any other defence contract and the collaboration between the Indian and foreign partner becomes one-time. There is no incentive for the Indian company to develop indigenous hardware.

While the MoD calls its tie-up with the private defence industry a ‘strategic partnership’, it is acutely aware that, for the private sector, it is just a business investment. “Defence industry is just one of the many options for the private sector player, which can invest its resources in real estate or airlines,” a defence ministry official says. This is also why private firms are wary of the SP model. “I am answerable to my shareholders, I have to pay interest on capital and I get no tax breaks from the government for investing in defence industry,” says the CEO of a private sector defence firm. “The SP model is not at all workable because it breaks the basic defence contracting principle where the government pays money to the prime contractor,” says Rahul Chaudhry, former CEO, Tata Power SED, and chair, FICCI Committee on Homeland Security.

THE GOVERNMENT’S STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP MODEL HAS BEEN MIRED IN DELAYS, WITH THREE OF THE FOUR PROJECTS STILL IN THEIR FIRST STAGE

SLOW BURNER PARTNERSHIPS

STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS WERE MEANT TO LEVERAGE INDIA’S POSITION AS AN ARMS BUYER INTO BRINGING TECHNOLOGY TO THE COUNTRY. HOWEVER, BUDGETARY SHORTFALLS AND BUREAUCRATIC HURDLES MEAN THE PROJECTS, COLLECTIVELY WORTH OVER RS 2.2 LAKH CRORE, ARE RUNNING YEARS BEHIND SCHEDULE



SUBMARINES

Project: 75 (I)

Number: 6 conventional submarines

Budget: Rs 60,000 crore

Status: Navy floated RFPs (request for proposals) on July 20, 2021; is in the process of evaluating competition

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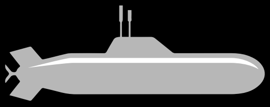

HELICOPTERS

Project: Naval Utility Helicopters

Number: 111 (95 assembled in India)

Budget: Rs 21,000 crore

Status: Adani defence, Bharat Forge Ltd, Mahindra Defence Systems, Tata Advanced Systems Ltd, Airbus Helicopters, Lockheed Martin & Russian helicopters have submitted proposals for this project. RFPs yet to be issued. Put on hold because HAL says it will field an NUH (naval utility helicopter).

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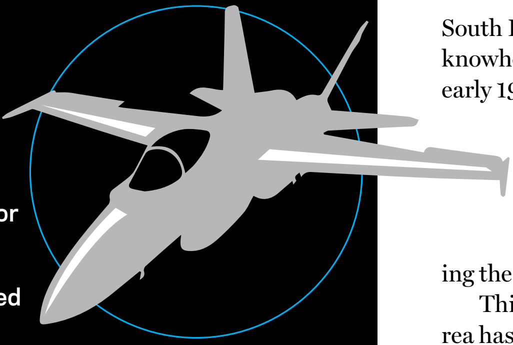
AIRCRAFT

Project: Fighter Aircraft

Number: 110

Budget: Over $15 billion (Rs 1.1 lakh crore)

Status: RFI (request for information) issued in April 2018 to Dassault Aviation, Saab, Lockheed Martin, Eurofighter GmbH and the United Aircraft Corporation. RFP yet to be issued.



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ARMOURED FIGHTING VEHICLES

Project: Future Ready Combat Vehicle

Number: 1,700 tanks

Budget: Over $5 billion (Rs 36,000 crore)

Status: Meant to replace the army's fleet of T-72 tanks; RFI issued in June 2021 to 12 OEMs (original equipment manufacturers); expected to respond by September 2021

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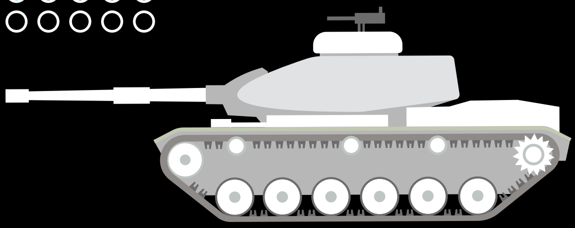


○ Steps remaining to complete the defence contract
● Steps Completed

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

The lack of assurance of further orders and uncertainty over what will happen to investments in plant and machinery also worries private players. Larsen & Toubro (L&T), for instance, invested in setting up a howitzer assembly line after a 'Buy and Make' tie-up with South Korea's Hanwha Techwin to supply 100 self-propelled howitzers for the Indian Army in 2015. This year, it delivered the last guns to the army and now its assembly line in Hazira, Gujarat, is idle. It will soon get a repeat order for 40 more howitzers, but after that, nothing.

LEARNING FROM THE SoKo MODEL

South Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering is one of five contenders offering to supply submarines for India's Project 75 (I) submarine-building programme (*see graphic above*). This offer is not without its irony. South Korea and India both bought submarine-building knowhow from the same West German firm, HDW, in the early 1980s. While the Indian conventional submarine programme floundered for decades, embroiled in corruption scandals and bureaucratic indecision, the South Korean programme developed improved variants and mastered the design till it fielded the DSME-3000, a version it is now offering the Indian Navy.

This is not a one-off. Over the past decade, South Korea has been a surprising entrant into the Indian defence market. Korean firms have won a Rs 4,500 crore contract to supply 100 K-9 howitzers to the Indian Army and emerged the cheapest bidders in contests to supply minesweepers for the Indian Navy and self-propelled air defence gun missile systems for the Indian Army. It has mastered the ability to manufacture sophisticated military hardware across all three domains—land, sea and air—a feat accomplished only by big countries with deep pockets, like China, Russia, and the US.

OVER THE PAST DECADE, SOUTH KOREA, HAS BEEN A SURPRISING ENTRANT INTO THE INDIAN DEFENCE MARKET

In its March 2021 report, the Stockholm Peace Research Institute noted that South Korea was the ninth largest arms exporter in 2016–20 with a 2.7 per cent share of the global total. Its arms exports in 2016-20 were 210 per cent higher than in 2011-15 and 649 per cent higher than in 2001-2005. 'South Korea implemented wide-ranging reforms to improve its defence industry's competitiveness, promoted greater competition among South Korea's chaebols and nurtured small- and mid-sized defence companies that could efficiently produce the components for combat systems. These reforms enabled not only its large defence integrators to lower their prices but also its smaller companies to enter global defence supply chains,' notes a 2019 paper by Felix K. Chang, senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute in Philadelphia.

These are lessons the MoD needs to learn. India's first attempt to create a level playing field for the private sector with the public sector—the Raksha Udyog Ratna (RUR) scheme in 2006—had proposed to designate select private sector majors as RURs to enable them to compete for defence contracts on par with the public sector. The scheme was scrapped in 2013 after private firms left out of the process said the government was creating monopolies within the private sector. The defence ministry needs to ensure its second attempt to energise the private defence manufacturing sector does not meet the same fate. ■

ADDED BENEFITS, HIDDEN COSTS?

MAKING FORTIFIED RICE A NATIONAL STANDARD IS A WELL-INTENTIONED MOVE, BUT EXPERTS WARN OF THE RISKS OF OVERDOSING ON MICRONUTRIENTS

Amarnath K. Menon

ON INDIA'S 75TH INDEPENDENCE DAY, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that the government will, by 2024, supply rice fortified with nutrients through the Public Distribution System (PDS) and food schemes targeting women and children. As a forerunner, to combat chronic anaemia and undernutrition, the Union ministry of consumer affairs, food & public distribution will distribute fortified rice through the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) Scheme and the Mid Day Meal Scheme (MDMS) from 2021-22, with a focus on 112 aspirational districts (those with poor socio-economic indicators). For this year, the Centre has allocated 32.8 million tonnes of rice for PDS, MDMS and the ICDS Scheme, under the National Food Security Act, 2013. But providing all of it as fortified rice by 2024 appears to be a tall task.

Rice fortification is enrichment of the cereal with micronutrients—commonly iron, Vitamin B12 and folic acid—to provide a nutritional boost to undernourished and vulnerable populations on a mega scale across geographies. According to Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI) norms, a kilo of fortified rice will contain 28-42.5 mg of iron, 75-125 mcg of folic acid and 0.75-1.25 mcg of Vitamin B12 (see *Super Rice*).

India bears the largest burden of iron deficiency and anaemia globally, with nearly 59 per cent of children and 50 per cent of pregnant women anaemic, according to the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4). Child and maternal malnutrition is responsible for 15 per cent of the country's total disease burden. The NFHS-4, conducted in 2015-2016, found the prevalence of underweight, stunted and wasted children under five years of age to be 35.7, 38.4 and 21 per cent, respectively.

The Union government believes rice fortification is the panacea for malnutrition and has been working on ironing out supply chain and other logistical issues in consultation with the NITI Aayog, FSSAI and non-governmental stakeholders such as Tata Trusts, World Food Programme, PATH and Nutrition International. India produces over a fifth of the world's rice. At a per capita consumption of 6.8 kilos a month, the country is the largest consumer of rice.

Rice fortification has been under-

GRAIN GAIN Fortified rice supplied to select states under a pilot scheme has been well accepted by people

way as a pilot scheme (one district per state) since 2019-20 in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Tamil Nadu and Chhattisgarh, with plans to extend this to Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, Uttarakhand, Kerala and Jharkhand. Preliminary data suggests that fortified rice is well accepted by the beneficiaries.

Fortification is meant to improve the nutritional quality of food to bring health benefits to people with minimal risks. For this, food additives need to be used in permitted quantities. For example, iodised salt, introduced in 1962 to tackle goitre, has had wide acceptance in the country. However, expert opinion is divided on the health benefits of fortified rice.

DOES FORTIFIED RICE WORK?

Public health experts say food fortification is one of the most sustainable strategies to address micronutrient deficiencies in people. Not only is it cost-effective, scientifically proven and globally recognised, supplies to the targeted populations can be easily ensured through the ongoing food delivery schemes. Rice has the highest uptake in government food security programmes, such as PDS, ICDS Scheme and MDMS, potentially making it an ideal choice for fortification. It can help tackle the micronutrient deficiencies ('hidden hunger') that endanger the health of vulnerable sections of the population.

Women of reproductive age, children and adolescents are the most vulnerable. "Fortified rice can provide 30-50 per cent of the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) of iron that adults need daily, based on average Indian consumption," says Mini Varghese, country director, India, Nutrition International, one of the organisations partnering with the government on the pilot project. "Trials in a controlled setting, where 100 per cent RDA of iron was ensured, showed results within 10 months. But with fortified rice, you need a minimum of 24 months to see the impact."

Nutrition International, in collaboration with the government's Food Fortification Resource Centre (FFRC), conducted an acceptability study this February for fortified rice in three districts of Madhya Pradesh. Over 400 beneficiaries of the ICDS Scheme and MDMS were served *khichdi* and *kheer* prepared with fortified rice. More than 80 per cent of them liked it and over 60 per cent expressed interest in fortified rice if available through the PDS, MDMS and ICDS Scheme. Self-help groups (SHGs) in the three districts concluded that there was no visible difference between fortified rice and regular PDS rice nor any changes while washing and cooking it. "Multiple studies have shown the efficacy of fortified rice. More than 17 scientific publications in over 25 countries, including India, have demonstrated that consumption of extruded fortified rice is safe and effective in women and children. It can significantly address iron deficiency," says Varghese.

A double-blind, placebo-controlled study in September 2011 by the Hyderabad-based National Institute of Nutrition in the adjacent Ranga Reddy district showed that regular intake of Micronised Ferric Pyrophosphate (MFPP) supplied through extruded fortified rice kernels reduces iron deficiency among schoolchildren. A double-blind study is a randomised trial in which neither the participants nor the experimenters know who all are part of the study.

A similar study in March 2012, conducted together by the St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru, and The Micronutrient Initiative (former name of Nutrition International), indicated that anaemia caused by iron deficiency had reduced from 30 per cent to 15 per cent among children who consumed fortified rice for seven months through a school mid-day meal programme in Bengaluru. The study showed that fortified rice (at 3-5 mg Fe per 100 g) was indistinguishable from natural rice, both in cooked and uncooked forms.

"Food fortification is a good move, but there is a long way to go before the results are visible," emphasises Dr V. Prakash, president, International Union of Food Science and Technology, and former director, Central Food Technological Research Institute, Mysuru. "Rice is a staple food in many parts of India and can provide the required micronutrients on a daily basis along with other foods it is eaten with.

32.8
MILLION TONNES
Centre's rice allocation for 2021-22 under PDS, MDMS and ICDS Scheme

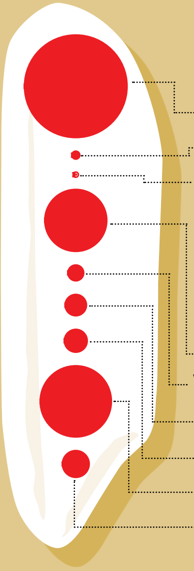
350,000
TONNES
Fortified rice kernels required to cover PDS across the country in 2024

28,000
RICE MILLERS
need to be equipped by FCI for supplying fortified rice

SUPER RICE

WHAT IS RICE FORTIFICATION?

The Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), which sets standards for food items in the country, defines fortification as "deliberately increasing the content of essential micronutrients in food to improve nutritional quality and provide public health benefits with minimal risk to health".



FSSAI guidelines state that a kilo of fortified rice shall contain:

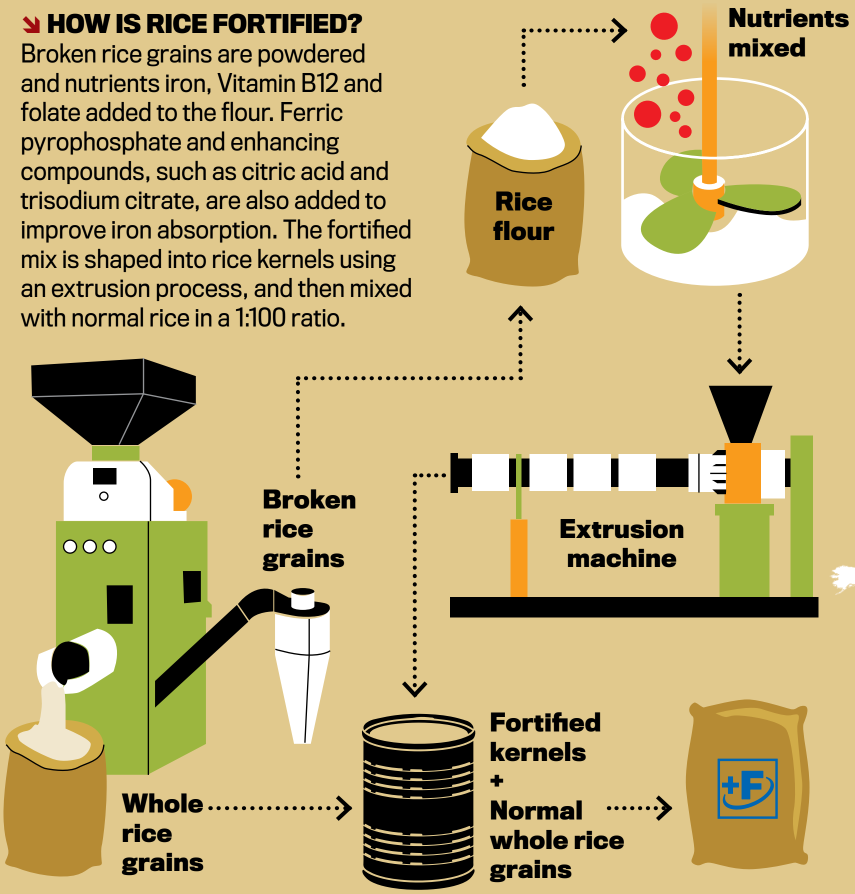
Iron	**28-42.5 mg**
Folic acid	**75-125 mcg**
Vitamin B12	**0.75-1.25 mcg**

Rice may additionally be fortified with micronutrients:

Zinc	**10-15 mg**
Vitamin A	**500-750 mcg RE**
Vitamin B1	**1-1.5 mg**
Vitamin B2	**1.25-1.75 mg**
Vitamin B3	**12.5-20 mg**
Vitamin B6	**1.5-2.5 mg**

HOW IS RICE FORTIFIED?

Broken rice grains are powdered and nutrients iron, Vitamin B12 and folate added to the flour. Ferric pyrophosphate and enhancing compounds, such as citric acid and trisodium citrate, are also added to improve iron absorption. The fortified mix is shaped into rice kernels using an extrusion process, and then mixed with normal rice in a 1:100 ratio.


Nutrients mixed
Rice flour
Broken rice grains
Extrusion machine
Whole rice grains
Fortified kernels + Normal whole rice grains
+F

HOW MUCH DOES THE PROCESS COST?

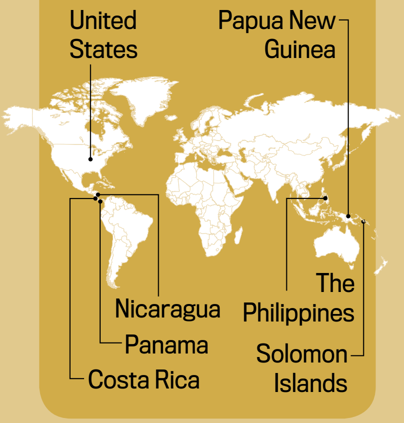
The Union government estimates the cost of producing fortified rice kernels (with iron, folic acid and Vitamin B12) at about Rs 0.60 a kilo. The cost will be shared by the Centre and the states, with the government compensating the rice millers.

HOW WILL FORTIFIED RICE BE IDENTIFIED?

Fortified rice will be packaged in jute bags with the logo **'+F'** and will carry the mandatory line **'Fortified with iron, folic acid and Vitamin B12'**.

+F

WHICH COUNTRIES HAVE MADE FORTIFICATION MANDATORY?


United States
Papua New Guinea
Nicaragua
Panama
Costa Rica
The Philippines
Solomon Islands

Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

This, hopefully, will be supplemented with enough proteins and other macro and micronutrients."

↘ LATENT HEALTH RISKS

Other experts say fortifying rice with one or two nutrients is not the answer to nutritional deficiencies since the other issue of ensuring sufficient amounts of quality protein in the diets of children and the convalescent remains. Experts also caution about the adverse impact of excess intake of micronutrients through food fortification.

Some point out that though the mandatory rice fortification programme is already being piloted in some districts, it focuses solely on the logistics without examining the intended benefits, such as alleviating anaemia. A perspective paper, published in *The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* in July 2021, makes a strong case for improving dietary diversity instead. The study, which was led by Dr Anura V. Kurpad of the Department of Physiology, St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, argues for extreme caution because nutrients (like medicines) are beneficial in the right dose but potentially harmful when taken in excess.

The paper argues that there is overestimating of anaemia and dietary iron deficiency in the country, primarily due to three factors—inappropriate haemoglobin cut-offs to diagnose anaemia in children or pregnant women; adoption of capillary (finger prick) blood sampling instead of venous sampling; and inflated daily iron requirement benchmarks, which have recently been corrected and revised down. "You don't need to fortify to meet the daily requirement of 15-18 mg in the Indian diet. We need to consider whether we really have an iron-deficient diet, or, if we are not adequately absorbing iron, and if many other factors cause anaemia. Putting more and more iron into the diet places a part of the population at risk of breaching the tolerable upper limit of intake," says Kurpad.

Kurpad terms mandatory rice fortification as a "knee-jerk reaction". "It is well known since the past 20 years that higher intake of iron increases the risk of diabetes. We are already the diabetes capital of the world. The RDA is a wrong metric for population requirement. We should follow the revised NIN (National Institute of Nutrition) 2020 dietary recommendations, which is half of the RDA," he says. "When we use it, many diets become magically adequate. People are not looking at the adequacy of dietary intake with the 2020 NIN recommendations. The corrected and apt population requirements can be met with a standard diverse diet."

> **"HIGHER IRON INTAKE HAS BEEN LINKED TO INCREASED RISK OF DIABETES. WE ARE ALREADY THE WORLD'S DIABETES CAPITAL"**
>
> **DR ANURA V. KURPAD,** *St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences, Bengaluru*

↘ NOT EVERYONE NEEDS IT

The government's plan is to mandatorily fortify rice and even edible oils with vitamins and minerals. Fortifying all rice through the country's estimated 28,000 rice millers is a humungous exercise. India's current capacity of producing 15,000 tonnes a year of fortified kernels is far from adequate to meet the ambitious target by 2024. The annual capacity needs to be in the range of 130,000 tonnes in order to cover the PDS, anganwadi and MDMS supplies in the 112 aspirational districts alone. To cover PDS across the country in 2024, at least 350,000 tonnes of fortified kernels will be needed.

The Food Corporation of India (FCI) has been asked to equip rice mills with blending machines needed to mix the kernels into regular rice. Rice millers will have to make the immediate investment and the government may consider offering loans and other incentives to create an enabling environment. Since the fortified kernels look and taste the same as regular rice grains, there is also a need for quality checks and monitoring to ensure that consumers are not taken for a ride. NABL (National Accreditation Board for Testing and Calibration Laboratories) and FSSAI laboratories are exploring how to build capacity for quality testing. Some of the other challenges are streamlining the supply chain of fortified rice in food programmes, installing adequate blenders at rice mills and training the millers and state and district officials.

Experts say mandatory fortification of rice will force even population groups that do not need it to take in the food additives. "Mandatory fortification of rice poses a food safety risk. The implementation of food safety laws is mainly left to states and Union territories; it is weak in several states," says the international food safety specialist Dr Ramesh V. Bhat.

Those against food fortification argue that the total dietary intake of people from a variety of food sources, and not just rice, needs to be taken into account. Natural foods, such as locally available green vegetables and fruits, including a variety of berries found in the tribal and rural areas, could provide the deficient nutrients to the vulnerable groups. "Only a third of RDA can come from fortification; the rest has to be sourced from natural foods," says Bhat.

Fortification is a preventive intervention and not a therapeutic one. It can help avert mild anaemia as a mid-term strategy and severe anaemia in the long run. There is overwhelming evidence in favour of complementing fortification with dietary diversification. "People take time to accept changes. A strong behavioural change communication strategy is required to create awareness about the health benefits of fortification and address the myths around it," says Varghese. But, as Kurpad cautions, "The cure might become the malady." ■

THE OTHER BIG CATS Leopards at Jhalana Reserve Forest

SPOTTING THE SPOTTED CATS

THE SUCCESS OF JHALANA RESERVE FOREST'S LEOPARD SAFARIS HAS LED TO PLANS TO EXTEND A LEOPARD CORRIDOR FROM JHALANA TO SARISKA

BY ROHIT PARIHAR

DHIRENDRA GODHA

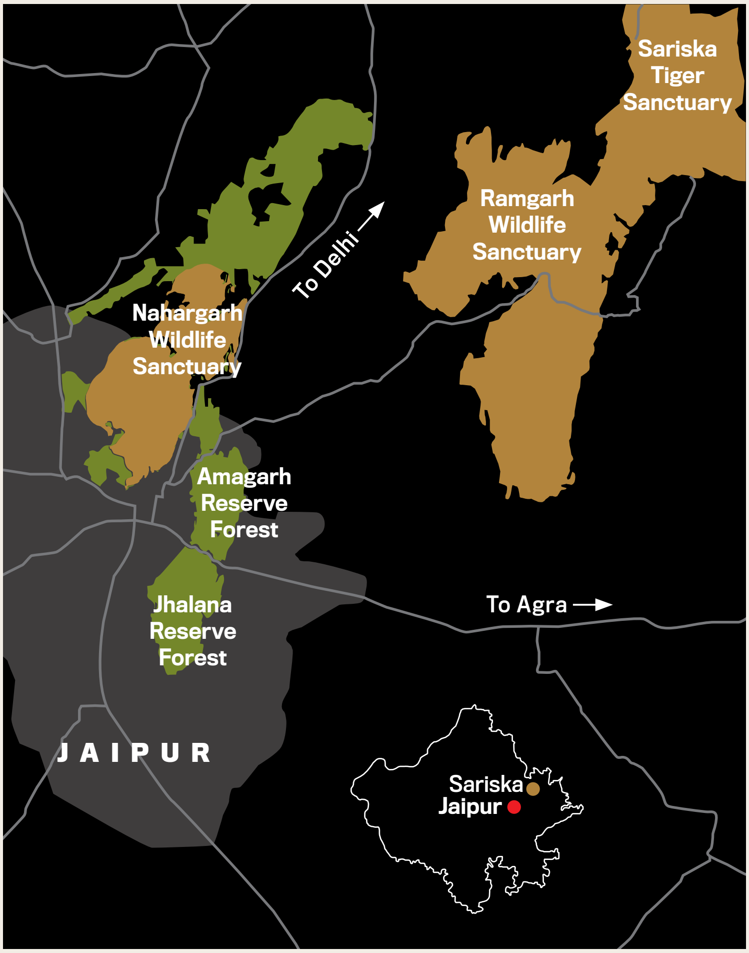
TRACKING INDIA'S LEOPARDS

Leopards are the major predators in most of India's forested landscapes. The Indian subspecies, *Panthera pardus fusca*, is found in all habitats of India, absent only in the arid Thar desert and the Sundarban mangroves. Recent studies suggest that they have experienced a 75-90 per cent population decline over the past two centuries as a result of human encroachment of their habitats, resulting in their status under the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) being downgraded from 'near threatened' to 'vulnerable'. They are listed in Schedule I of the Indian Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, which gives them the highest protection available under law. A study by the WII and the NTCA, published in 2021, estimated that there are about 13,000 leopards across India—the study was conducted in 2018-19 using camera traps in tiger habitats, which captured images of about 5,200 spotted cats across 26,838 locations.

A FORTNIGHT AGO, FORESTERS IN RAJASTHAN'S Jhalana Reserve Forest (JRF) spotted leopardess Flora with two cubs. Though India's leopard population has been rising over the past few years, this was especially cheering since the Rajasthan government had announced in October 2018 that Jhalana would become home to the country's first leopard safari. With around 29 adults and 15 cubs, of which 12 were born this year, some say JRF now has the world's highest density of leopards, though officials say this may be a premature claim.

Nonetheless, the JRF has seen much interest from officials, tourists and wildlife experts. There are also plans to replicate its success in nearby areas, ultimately creating a corridor linking it with the nearby Sariska Tiger Reserve, about 100 km away. "JRF is emerging as a success story in the making, but we need to nurture it," says Deep Narayan Pandey, Rajasthan's principal chief conservator of forests and the head of its forest force. "In the same way that Ranthambore is the best place to see tigers, Jhalana is the best place to see leopards."

In India, leopards are often treated as the poor cousins of tigers, being among the least-studied large cats. Jhalana could change this as well. Swapnil Kumbhojkar, principal researcher of Jhalana Wildlife Research Foundation, who has also worked as a game ranger at the Kruger National Park in South Africa, says the JRF offers a good opportu-



Rajasthan forest officials plan to extend a leopard corridor from Jhalana to Sariska, passing through Amagarh, Nahargarh and Ramgarh

nity to improve our understanding of leopard behaviour. In March 2020, in a paper he co-authored, he describes one such moment. In 2019, Flora, the leopardess mentioned earlier, had lost two of her cubs. Officials and tourists spotted her sitting atop a hill calling for them. After about an hour, she spotted two striped hyenas sitting under a tree with crows circling above it, a worrying sign. She ran down the hill, snaking past acacia trees and safari jeeps to reach the tree, which she climbed. A few moments later, a pall of gloom descended on the tourists and officials who saw her climbing down carrying a dead cub in her jaws, which she then carried off into the thorny cacti of the Aravalli hills. “This is the first case [we had observed] of a leopard mother taking her dead cub away from scavengers,” says Kumbhojkar. His team also spotted a male leopard sitting atop a nearby hill, and suspect that he was responsible for the death of the cub.

In a paper published last year, Kumbhokjar also claimed that Jhalana had among the highest densities of leopard populations in India, at 0.86 per sq. km, estimating that 25 adult leopards live in a roughly 29 sq. km area. However, arriving at an exact figure is not easy, as it is only areas where tiger censuses are frequently conducted that are well equipped with camera traps. A study of tiger habitats, conducted in 2018-19 by the Wildlife Institute of India (WII) and the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA) across 20 states—‘Status of Leopards, Co-predators and Megaherbivores’, published in July 2021—estimated that the Srivilliputhur Grizzled Squirrel Wildlife Sanctuary in Tamil Nadu had the highest leopard density at the time, at 20.43 per 100 sq. km. Rajasthan was estimated to have 476 leopards across three tiger reserves, with 83 in Mukundara, 105 in Ranthambore and 273 in Sariska.

While officers are unwilling to be drawn on whether JRF now has the highest leopard density in India, they are happy to claim that leopard sightings are easier in Jhalana than anywhere else. In terms of leopard visibility, Jhalana is comparable to Jawai Dam in Rajasthan’s Pali district, where leopards occupy the hillocks above the plains and farms of the locals (neither JRF nor Jawai Dam are tiger reserves). Locals and hoteliers arrange private safaris in this region, as most of the land is privately owned. While it is difficult to assess the total number of leopards here, locals say there are between 50 and 60 spotted cats in the area.

THE JRF WAS DESIGNATED a reserve forest in 1961, under the Rajasthan Forest Act of 1953. A northern tropical dry deciduous forest, it is located to the southeast of Jaipur, at an average height of 516 metres above sea level. About 20 years ago, the state forest department had begun efforts to increase the planting of local vegetation in the forest. Then, in 2015, Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje ordered the JRF to be developed into an area for leopard safaris and also the setting up of Rajasthan’s Project Leopard. By 2017, entry restrictions were put in place for the reserve, and in October 2018, Chief Minister Raje formally inaugurated a two-and-a-half-hour leopard safari in JRF, along three routes. Today, JRF has a 32-kilometre boundary wall made of brick and thorny bushes, which has greatly reduced encroachments, turning it into a green island and a heat sink for the area. “The unique characteristic of Jhalana is that it is an urban forest located right next to the heart of Jaipur city,” says Sunil Mehta, a member of the Rajasthan Wildlife Board and the India head of the World Wilderness Congress. “Over three million people live on one side of the boundary, with about

SAFARI STORIES

Since leopard safaris began in the Jhalana Reserve Forest (the safaris were soft-launched in 2017), about 100,000 tourists have visited. Twelve electric vehicles and Gypsys take visitors on two-hour tours on one of three routes through the reserve. Deep Narayan Pandey, Rajasthan's principal chief conservator of forests, says Jhalana is the best place in India to see leopards, the way Ranthambore is for tigers. The forest and its adjoining areas are believed to have a population of nearly 30 adult leopards. The success of these safaris has led officials to work on developing similar reserves in nearby areas, building a wildlife corridor from Jhalana to the Sariska Tiger Reserve, passing through Amagarh, Nahargarh and Ramgarh. The estimated cost for habitat-strengthening efforts is about Rs 50 crore, while mitigation measures are expected to cost another Rs 100 crore.

THE JHALANA RESERVE FOREST HAS AMONG THE HIGHEST LEOPARD DENSITIES IN INDIA, ESTIMATED TO BE IN THE REGION OF 0.86 CATS PER SQ. KM

100,000 living very close to or inside the forest areas on the other side."

Since then, significant efforts have been made to develop JRF, from habitat stabilisation to grassland development, with the aim of building a fodder and prey base for the animals living within its confines. Local fruit trees have been planted to attract animals and birds, and encroachments have been removed. "Our aim has been to strengthen the ecology of Jhalana and adjoining areas as much as possible through local species, instead of introducing new ones," says Pandey. As a result, JRF also has 24 water bodies, of which 17 are filled by borewell. A dozen of these are maintained with solar power-operated pumps, with the rest filled by tankers. JRF is home to 220 species of plants, 33 species of mammals, 132 bird species and 20 species of snakes. Aside from leopards, the most frequently sighted animals here include hyenas, desert foxes, jackals, jungle cats, desert cats, cheetals and sambars.

In terms of the prey base for leopards, there is a huge population of feral dogs in the area. An analysis of leopard scats has revealed that the spotted cats in Jhalana primarily prey on dogs and cats, given the lack of other options. Goats and cattle are also part of their diet, as are rodents, hares, small Indian civets, macaques, northern plains grey langurs and mongooses. Jhalana now has a well-established food chain, with the leopards eating dogs and cats, which in turn prey on the rodents that infest the area. In contrast, at the Sariska Tiger Reserve, 84 per cent of the leopard kills are of cattle, according to a report by Gobind Sagar Bhardwaj, the additional principal chief conservator of forests.

Jhalana's others successes include rewilding other species, including cheetals that have been shifted here from zoos. Of the hundreds that have been shifted here, about 15 have survived and become a sort of founder population. "They have got used to living in the wild, and developed instincts to survive leopards," says Pandey. He wants to develop a founder population of 20 cheetal and 20 sambar deer to ensure their numbers grow, and has proposed similar measures for other nearby leopard habitats. It is crucial to keep the leopards' dependence on cattle to a minimum in Jhalana and around Jaipur to avoid conflict with humans. This problem will grow more pressing as officials proceed with plans to set up more reserves and open them to safaris.

Forest officials and independent observers have also found that the leopards of Jhalana are ranging out as far as Achrol, some 40 kilometres away. Officials say leopards have been frequenting nearby human localities, but since they are rarely seen and have few conflicts with humans, they return home safely. Kumbhojka says the latest studies reveal that the male leopards in JRF have larger—but unfixed—territories, while the females and their female cubs establish home ranges near the areas that they are born. This is why the department is considering including 16 sq. km of Amagarh Range into the JRF safari area, to ensure leopards have a larger area within which to hunt and roam. Another priority is to begin restricted safaris in 50 sq. km of Nahargarh, a small forest area in Achrol, and then in a 300 sq. km area in the Ramgarh range, which the government had clubbed with the 1,100 sq. km of Sariska Tiger Reserve in 2019 to strengthen it by adding resources.

While habitat-strengthening efforts are estimated to cost about Rs 50 crore, creating mitigation measures to connect these various areas will cost about Rs 100 crore. This is not a big price to pay to be able to conduct leopard safaris all along a 100-kilometre stretch outside Jaipur before one enters the Sariska Tiger Reserve. ■

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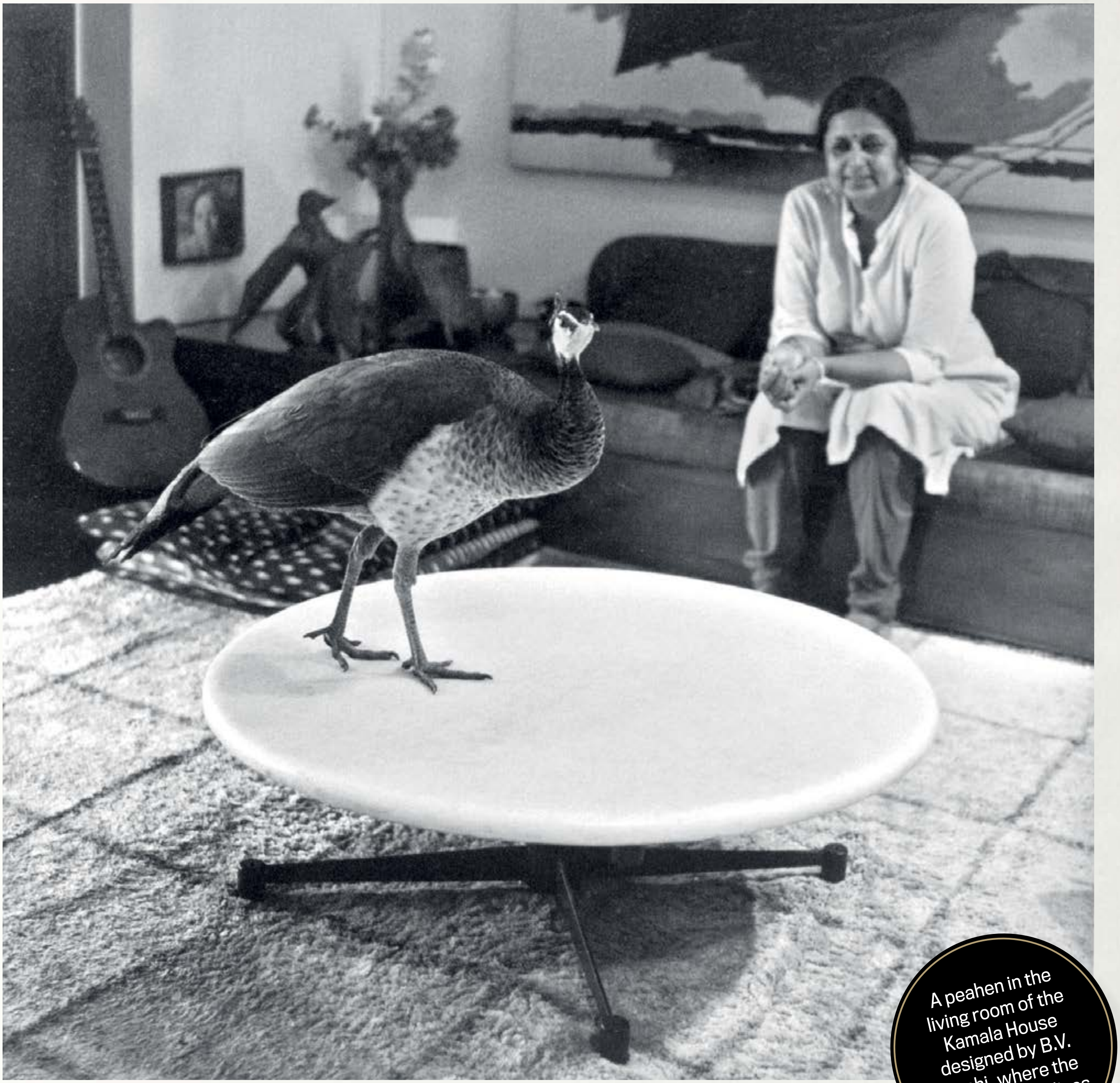
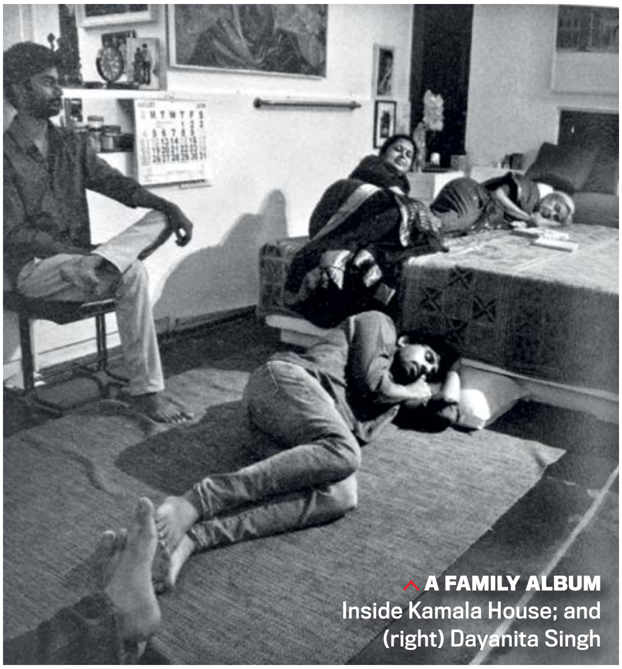


A peahen in the living room of the Kamala House designed by B.V. Doshi, where the architect also lives

BOOKS

HOW TO BUILD A FAMILY HOME

In **Dayanita Singh's** *photographs of B.V. Doshi and the homes he has designed, architecture is brought alive by a touch both human and humane*



A FAMILY ALBUM Inside Kamala House; and (right) Dayanita Singh

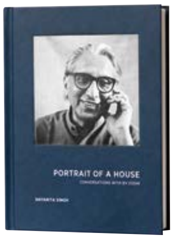
DAYANITYA SINGH GIVES US A BOOK QUITE UNLIKE EITHER ONE ON PHOTOGRAPHY OR ON ARCHITECTURE

“ARE ARCHITECTS BUILDING spaces with the photograph in mind? That would be a dangerous trend if that were so,” muses Dayanita Singh, as she tells Balkrishna Doshi that the relationship between architecture and photography is ‘tricky’. This eminent photographer/ artist’s conversations with India’s only Pritzker Prize Laureate and most loved architect stay within this liminal ‘tricky’ space, giving us a book quite unlike either one on photography or on architecture.

Singh accepted a commission from an international magazine on architecture to photograph Doshi’s home in Ahmedabad because she wanted to meet him. What was to be a routine assignment changed the moment Doshi asked her how she would make a still photograph speak. This sparked off a conversation between the two that led her to return several times to photograph homes designed by Doshi (the Kamala House in Ahmedabad, the Tejal House and Maneesha House in Vadodara) and to spend time with his family.

Portrait of a House is the happy outcome of these interactions. Singh explores the notion of home through her camera as an embedded inhabitant rather than a neutral observer. She captures interior architecture not through its material formalities but through its lived experience. Then she uses the final (still) images to ‘prompt’ the subject of her gaze (Doshi) into a vivid, free-ranging dialogue on light, space, framing, and family. Singh gives us an insight into the Kamala House, inhabited for the past 58 years by its architect, his wife (after whom the house is named) and family. Here Doshi’s daughters grew to adulthood and now with their children, three generations all move and stretch into its interstices with easy familiarity, each element—seating, stairs, windows and corridors—becomes an extension of their own bodies. There is a sense of touch that is the glue to bind both its occupants and the space they occupy.

“How do you give people a chance to become themselves, lose themselves?” Doshi asks. “Where does formality become informality to the point of almost intimacy?” In image after image, Singh finds the answer—through the way the family reaches out to each other. Hands touch heads, caress feet, reach out around shoulders and waists, fingers intertwine with fingers, heads touch heads; quiet embraces are the natural currency in this act of home-making. Tactility is the medium by which one understands architecture itself, and the intentions of its designer. Space is used through touch, as its occupants sit, sleep, eat and speak: beds become *baithaks* for all to shoot the breeze, sofas are sat upon cross-legged, and stairs become impromptu dining spaces.



PORTRAIT OF A HOUSE
Conversations with B.V. Doshi
by Dayanita Singh
SPONTANEOUS BOOKS
₹1,800; 152 pages

The Kamala House was built in 1963, during the height of Modernism in post-Independence Indian architecture. Valorisation of form and space was the norm during that period. The severity of the designers’ gaze at the formal articulations of their own creations, as seen for example, by Doshi’s own mentor Le Corbusier, are quietly subverted in this, his own home. Spaces flow into spaces in unexpected ways. An annexe bedroom is, unusually, accessed by diagonally cutting across another bedroom. All this, of course, makes sense once one sees how these spaces are used. As an architect, I was delighted to find simple but expressive floor plans of all three houses included with the photographs. As I turned the pages of Dayanita Singh's 'family album', the houses unfolded before me and I became part of it through an easy familiarity.

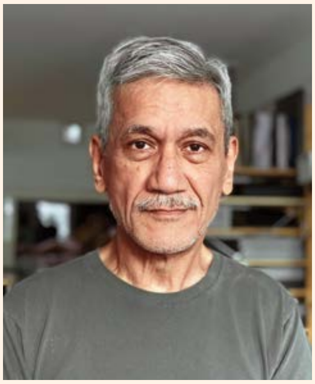
But this is not what the conversations between Singh and Doshi set out to do. The architect's ruminations were intended to focus on the photographer's images, how she made them speak, through light, and composition. The happy derailment into family and domesticity are the best thing about this book. Doshi does, of course, talk about his use of light, demonstrating through various manipulations of window openings its changing character on interior space. He talks of volume, of split levels, study spaces and zen views of his back garden, and then, suddenly, there is a peahen in the living room! And once again, we are in the midst of a private moment, an ephemeral moment that dissolves the materiality of the architecture into something humanely palpable.

This is neither a book on architecture, nor on photography, but certainly a way in which a house should be photographed for a viewer. That this is achieved is due to its exquisite design by Rukminee Guha Thakurta. On every page, the juxtaposition of images and text, with a judicious use of white space, allows the '*sawaal-jawaab*', to use Singh's own words, to articulate the conversation between her images and Doshi's appreciation of them. I cannot think of a better way to celebrate the great architect's 94th birthday, which coincided with the release of this book. ■

–Mustansir Dalvi

PHOTOGRAPHY

BRINGING INTO FOCUS



The winner of this year's Kraszna-Krausz Photobook Award, **SUNIL GUPTA** has spent his career trying to give his gay subjects their place in art history

^ VIEWFINDER (top) Sunil Gupta; and a photograph of Christopher Street, New York, by Gupta

When Sunil Gupta first realised that he could be gay (back in the early 1970s), "that thing did not even have a name." The New Delhi-born Gupta was living in Montreal at the time. He recalls coming back home from college one day, determined to tell his father about his sexual orientation. "Here was a military man who sorted things out by showing people a stick," says Gupta with a laugh. "I knew he wouldn't understand and because he might have been uninformed, I had made a reading list of books on homosexuality. So, I told him and he suggested 'therapy'. I had never heard the man use that word before." His mother, a school teacher, however, "cried and cried".

Gupta, who has photo exhibitions currently underway in London and Munich and another due at the Vadehra Art Gallery in New Delhi this December, has spent the last four decades as a tireless crusader and chronicler of gay life and rights. His aim was to give a voice to his much-ignored people. "Gay Indians were absent from art history. We always existed but nobody bothered to notice," Gupta, 67, tells us. What started out as "cultural activism" later turned into a sharp gaze on sexuality, gender, diasporic culture, race relations, HIV-AIDS and on both the political and personal aspects of being gay.

Gupta now lives in London with his partner, but some of his more poignant images were produced in New Delhi. Shot decades apart, *Exiles* and its sequel, *Mr Malhotra's Party*, are testament to the rapidly changing social landscape of urban India. His *Exiles* series, for example, explored the forbidden pleasures of homosexuality in 1980s India but Gupta's subjects remained anonymous. At the turn of the millennium, Gupta, to his utter delight, found that his millennial gay and lesbian protagonists were unafraid to reveal their true identity for his series *Mr Malhotra's Party*. "Maybe money has something to do with it. Maybe, it's more freedom. Or just that youngsters in New Delhi can hang out more at coffee shops and in bars rather than only going for weddings," he says.

SUNIL GUPTA won the prestigious Kraszna-Krausz Photobook Award for his From Here to Eternity this year

Gupta, who won the prestigious Kraszna-Krausz Photobook Award for his *From Here to Eternity* this year, feels that gender identity in India is now seeing a "seismic shift". By repealing Section 377, the Supreme Court, he says, might have paved the way for same-sex marriage, surrogacy and adoption. "These are big things," he says, but, ultimately, he is after a thing even bigger: "100 per cent equality!" ■

–Shaikh Ayaz

CINEMA

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

INSTEAD OF DEPICTING THE SHADES AND COMPLEXITIES OF A POLITICAL CAREER, THALAIVI CHOOSES TO CANONISE J. JAYALALITHAA. THE BIGGER PROBLEM IS THAT IT'S A DULL FILM

Two dramatic sequences—set 24 years apart—open the new Jayalalithaa biopic *Thalaivi*. One of these shows the young Jaya (Kangana Ranaut) performing in the florid mode of 1960s Tamil cinema—writhing under a waterfall, jiggling her hips—and a glimpse of her soon-to-be leading man, superstar 'MJR' (Arvind Swamy). But just before this comes a scene that is as theatrical in its way. It is set in the Tamil Nadu legislative assembly in 1989 and depicts Jaya—new to politics—being manhandled during a scuffle between opposing parties. Whereupon she compares herself to Draupadi, denouncing men who don't know how to respect women, and promises revenge.

To watch this opening is to be reminded that all successful politicians, even the relatively dignified ones, are performers: presenting a version of themselves for public consumption. And what happens in a political arena—especially the Indian parliamentary proceedings—can be more melodramatic and outlandish than anything in an over-the-top film.

It also suggests *Thalaivi* might be a film about politicians as actors, and actors as politicians—a clever view of the workings of realpolitik. Instead, it settles conservatively into a portrait of Jayalalithaa as saint, wanting to acquire power only so she can use it for a good cause. One of the conceits here is that a woman can help clean up politics through empathy and a willingness to go to the grassroots. ("I will never like or understand politics," Jaya says, but an epiphany hits her when she realises that a caring touch is required.) This results in a manipulative, one-note film, full of shots of Jaya being talked down to or pushed around—the main agenda being to create sympathy for someone who is trying to bring compassion to a callous or apathetic space.

We don't exactly have a tradition of robust cinema

Thalaivi, starring Kangana Ranaut, offers sanitised depictions of J. Jayalalithaa's life

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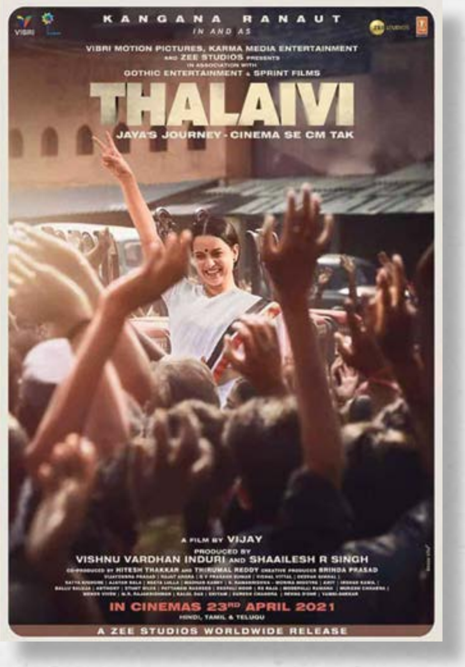
KANGANA RANAUT
IN AND AS
VIBRI MOTION PICTURES, KARMA MEDIA ENTERTAINMENT AND ZEE STUDIOS PRESENTS
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
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THALAIVI
JAYA'S JOURNEY - CINEMA SE CM TAK
A FILM BY VIJAY
PRODUCED BY
VISHNU VARDHAN INDURI AND SHAAILESH R SINGH
CO-PRODUCED BY HITESH THAKKAR AND THIRUMAL REDDY CREATIVE PRODUCER BRINDA PRASAD
IN CINEMAS 23RD APRIL 2021
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A ZEE STUDIOS WORLDWIDE RELEASE

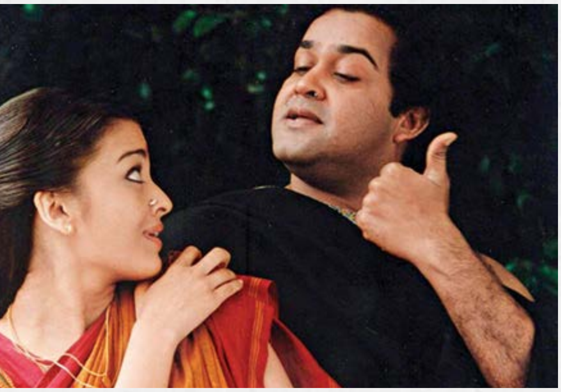
HERSTORY (clockwise from top) Kangana Ranaut as J. Jayalalithaa; Aishwarya Rai-Bachchan in *Iruvar*; Jayalalithaa; and a poster of *Thalaivi*

built around real-life political figures. One can't help compare *Thalaivi* with Mani Ratnam's 1997 *Iruvar*, a fictionalised account of the relationship between M.G. Ramachandran and M. Karunanidhi—which featured a character who marginally resembled the young Jayalalithaa. (A confession: this viewer spent the more tedious bits of *Thalaivi* day-dreaming about *Iruvar*.) One reason why that earlier film was so effective was that by shrugging off the need for saphead verisimilitude, it could reach more poetic truths about friendship and politics, ideology and lived experience, while also revealing something important about 20th century Tamilian history and the celebrity cult. *Thalaivi*, on the other hand, is supposedly a straight Jaya biopic, and yet, in the interests of prudence, it slightly alters character names (MGR becomes MJR) and offers sanitised depictions of events along with a highlights reel of Jayalalithaa's life.

Worse, it does this lifelessly. What's most surprising is not that this film is hagiographical, but that it is so dull. Kangana Ranaut has been such a controversial figure recently, using social media as a personal kingdom for shrill, gratuitous pronouncements, even being banished from it before making a dramatic return—the way Jayalalithaa did on the political stage at various points during her career—you would think the casting alone would make for an entertaining movie that moves through layers of artifice, reality and meta-references. But that doesn't happen. For every playful touch (e.g., the teenage Jaya reading *Caesar and Cleopatra* as she prepares for a tempestuous relationship with a much older, Godlike man), there are 10 other moments where the dialogue is tiresomely on the nose. Tell, don't show is mostly the motto and the showing, when it happens, is in slow motion. Ironically, by presenting Jayalalithaa only as someone who is constantly condescended to and who must goad herself to new heights in response, the film itself diminishes her.

- Jai Arjun Singh

[The film watched for this review was the Tamil version]



JAISON G

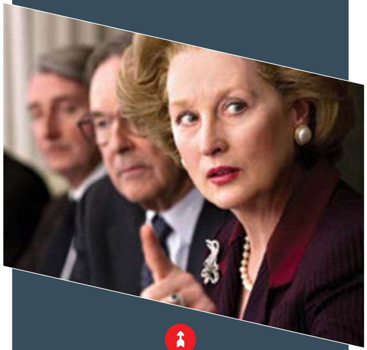
WATCHLIST

PERFORMING POWER

International biopics based on women politicians

A WOMAN CALLED GOLDA (1982)

Anyone who thinks a big star shouldn't play a real-life figure should watch Ingrid Bergman submerging her own personality into that of Israeli prime minister Golda Meir



THE IRON LADY (2011)

The film, starring Meryl Streep, about the waxing and waning of Margaret Thatcher is at its best when it tries to capture truth in a little moment rather than replicate the big, well-known episodes

GAME CHANGE (2012)

Julianne Moore plays Sarah Palin in this award-winning TV film that manages not to caricature an easily-lampooned figure

BOOKS

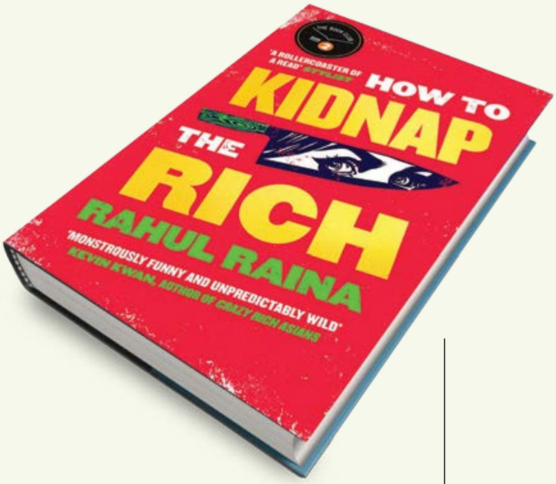
BLOOD IN THE SAMBHAR

Nirupama Subramanian tells the story of the life and crimes of dosa king **P. Rajgopal**

For decades, Chennai had few places where the whole family could eat a meal in cleanliness and peace. The few eateries that dotted the metropolis were largely "military hotels", hole-in-the-wall places serving cheap non-veg to an all-male clientele. All that changed in the 1980s with the mushrooming of several clean, air-conditioned restaurants specialising in regional cuisine. But vegetarian eat-and-run places were still few. Vasantha Bhavan, Saravana Bhavan and other chains, each enjoying brief moments in the spotlight, have now carved out the market among themselves.

Yet, few of them have earned as much commendation and condemnation as Saravana Bhavan, founded in 1981 by P. Rajagopal in K.K. Nagar, a developing corner of the metropolis. It soon spread across the city, serving fresh and affordable vegetarian fare. It would have been a fine case-study in a management course.

Saravana Bhavan would have been a fine case study in a management course, but **P. Rajagopal** also had other things on his mind: women


'A ROLLERCOASTER OF A READ' STYLIST
HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH
RAHUL RAINA
'MONSTROUSLY FUNNY AND UNPREDICTABLY WILD'
KEVIN KWAN, AUTHOR OF CRAZY RICH ASIANS

HOW TO KIDNAP THE RICH
by Rahul Raina
LITTLE, BROWN
₹599; 304 pages

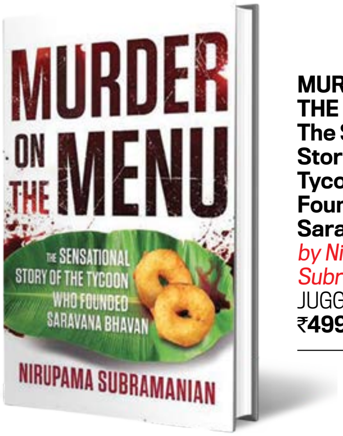
BOOKS

WHERE INDIA ISN'T SHINING

Rahul Raina's fictional ride into Delhi's underbelly doesn't always live up to its momentum or promise

Poverty need not be a terminal condition. It also need not be tragic. In Rahul Raina's debut novel *How to Kidnap the Rich*, Ramesh Kumar, a poor, lower-caste Delhi boy narrates his rags-to-riches dramedy like a stand-up comic; all piquant flourishes and biting irony. Kumar, motherless, and raised by an abusive tea-seller father near Kashmere Gate, is picked up by a bleeding-heart white nun and offered the chance at an education. By 24, he has become an "educational consultant": he impersonates wealthy teenagers and successfully cracks entrance exams for them.

This is fertile terrain for


MURDER ON THE MENU
THE SENSATIONAL STORY OF THE TYCOON WHO FOUNDED SARAVANA BHAVAN
NIRUPAMA SUBRAMANIAN

MURDER ON THE MENU
The Sensational Story of the Tycoon Who Founded Saravana Bhavan
by Nirupama Subramanian
JUGGERNAUT
₹499; 208 pages

But Rajagopal also had something else on his mind: women.

In *Murder on the Menu*, Nirupama Subramanian recaptures the rise and fall of India's dosa king for readers outside the state with every tiring detail of his growth and his severely damaged value system. Skip the background and the stereotypes about Chennai's conservatism and it makes for a good afternoon read.

Through interviews and visits, the author traces in straightforward journalistic style how a poor boy growing up in the tiny village of Punnaiyadi near the southeastern corner of Tamil Nadu slogged like thousands of other Nadar boys in sweat shops. After opening small grocery shops, Rajagopal tied up with two others to start a small eatery in a developing corner of Chennai in 1981. Saravana Bhavan was born. It came not only with the promise of "unlimited meals" but also clean toilets and an atmosphere in which even women would comfortably eat alone. His early experience as a cleaner in a tiny restaurant served him well. He was uncompromising about quality and hygiene. Saravana Bhavan soon spread across 22 countries, with 112 restaurants.

Like a lot of people who strike it rich, he never forgot his humble roots, doling out generously to temples and religious activities in his village. But the sleaze in him soon surfaced. Despite being married, he coveted the wife of his chef and forced her to move in with him. As his empire grew, he then lusted after the wife of yet another employee. The woman repeatedly rejected his entreaties and stood up to his threats. Rajagopal had her husband murdered and that led to his downfall. He used all his money to chase the case up to the Supreme Court, where he lost. Immediately after the judgment, the dosa king died a perfectly timed death. He never served time in prison and never admitted to committing a crime. ■

- G. Krishnan

Raina; India is a mecca for education-related rackets, assorted scams and the short-lived celebrity of the teenage topper. Things start to get messy when Kumar tops the exam for Rudraksh "Rudi" Saxena, an obnoxious 18-year-old. Rudi is propelled to overnight stardom and Kumar, the lackey, hangs on to live off the growing spoils. Reality TV comes calling and the deceitful duo careens through the novel, first tasting glory and excess, before being hit by a series of misadventures.

> Suresh Raina conjures up a tragi-comedic portrait of India, and of Delhi especially

When the novel opens, we immediately know some pretty zany stuff is about to unfold, because we are told, "The first kidnapping wasn't my fault. The others—those were definitely me." Rudi and Kumar get embroiled in madcap capers that, along the way, feature a love interest, an upright investigator and a pompous television producer.

Raina has a way with words; they thrum, they pound, they tumble on top of another with an elegant playfulness as he builds on his almost made-for-film tale. He conjures up a tragi-comedic portrait of India, and Delhi in particular, mining inequality, squalor and desperation for laughs. Air India is "another of our great national shames, like the '62 war and female illiteracy", and India itself "smells like a country that has gone off, all the dreams having curdled and clumped like rancid *paneer*".

Delhi—New and Old—emerges in all its blistering contradictions, its grime and grandeur, its shitting pigeons, its high-net-worth individuals and higher AQIs. "For one thing, we were in New Delhi, get-up-and-go New Delhi, centre-of-the-world's-greatest-democracy-New Delhi", Raina writes, "just homicidal drivers, aggressively corrupt police and choking, lung-throttling pollution".

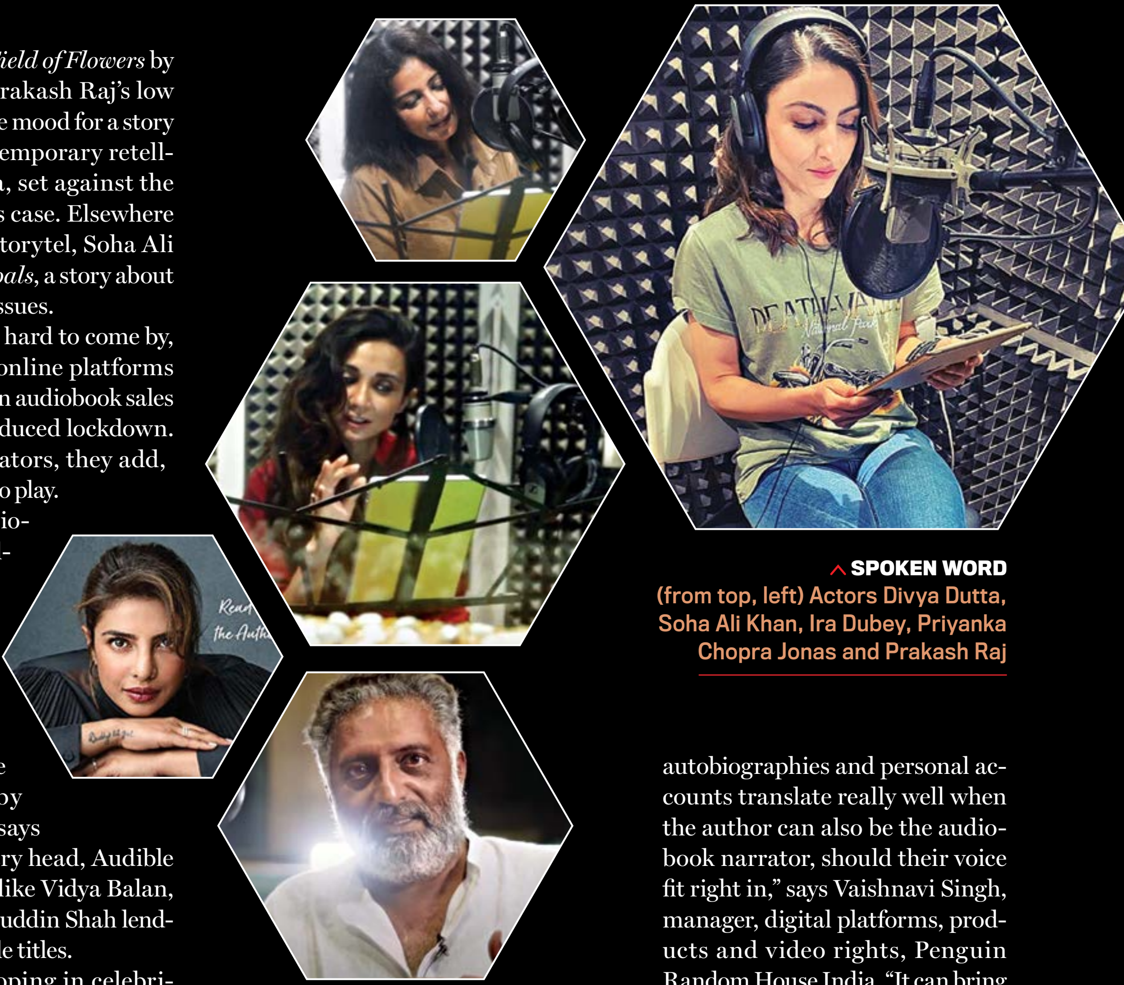
The plot crackles with as much intensity as Raina's pungent, punchy narration. But the book flags around the middle and lurches towards an anti-climactic end where well-worn themes become too easy punching bags: "the saffrons", corruption, and cartoonish jingoism. Characters at times teeter into caricature, and the rendering, laced through with Americanisms, occasionally feels inauthentic, as if written by an outsider. For example, measurements in miles, references to "jury duty" and "assistant mayors" among other minor, alien cultural references.

It's an original, clever novel, at times too pleased with its own cleverness but unafraid to embrace its over-the-top ambitions and deliver on the promise of fun. ■

- Bhavya Dore

STARS IN OUR EARS

Indian celebrities have taken to narrating books for fans and readers alike



SPOKEN WORD
(from top, left) Actors Divya Dutta, Soha Ali Khan, Ira Dubey, Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Prakash Raj

In the audiobook *A Field of Flowers* by Anita Nair, actor Prakash Raj's low guttural tone sets the mood for a story described as a contemporary retelling of the Mahabharata, set against the backdrop of the Hathras case. Elsewhere on the audiobook app Storytel, Soha Ali Khan narrates *#couplegoals*, a story about a couple facing marital issues.

Although figures are hard to come by, publishing houses and online platforms say they saw an increase in audiobook sales during the pandemic-induced lockdown. Talented celebrity narrators, they add, may well have had a part to play. "Celebrity-narrated audiobooks and shows have always been popular, but I think people's interest in them surged during the pandemic, as it set film and TV releases way back. People were still able to consume new content voiced by their favourite actors," says Shailesh Sawlani, country head, Audible India, which has actors like Vidya Balan, Boman Irani and Naseeruddin Shah lending their voices to multiple titles.

Storytel has been roping in celebrities like Ira Dubey, Rahul Bose and Anupam Kher to narrate titles ever since they launched here in 2017. "Audiobooks are new to the Indian market and as celebrities command attention, they encourage people to try them out," says Sukirti Sharma, brand & marketing head of Storytel India.

In December 2020, HarperCollins India set up their own audio publishing programme to offer their titles on Google Play, Apple iTunes and Scribd, besides Audible and Storytel. The publishing house currently takes celebrities onboard as narrators only for their own books, like Kubbra Sait for her forthcoming *Open Book* and Dolly Thakore for her just-released memoir *Regrets, None*. "Listeners enjoy well-narrated audiobooks—no matter if it's a celebrity at the mic or not," says Arcopol Chaudhuri, senior editor, new media, HarperCollins India. "While casting, the only questions we ask ourselves are: who is the right person to narrate this story and can our budgets afford them?"

Penguin Random House India, too, has had celebrities like Priyanka Chopra Jonas and Divya Dutta narrating their own books. "Memoirs, autobiographies and personal accounts translate really well when the author can also be the audiobook narrator, should their voice fit right in," says Vaishnavi Singh, manager, digital platforms, products and video rights, Penguin Random House India. "It can bring the whole experience to a full circle for both the writer and readers."

MEMOIRS TRANSLATE VERY WELL IF THE CELEBRITY AUTHOR IS ALSO THE AUDIOBOOK NARRATOR

Ultimately, though, content is the real hero. "Our key emphasis is on the quality of content and we see who can do justice to the story," says Sharma. Chaudhuri adds that besides the writing, such an audiobook's success also depends on the celebrity's fan following, their interest in audiobooks and, crucially, whether or not that celebrity's voice suits that audiobook. Sawlani says, "In our experience, three key factors determine the love and acceptance of a piece of spoken word entertainment—good story, high production value and quality narration." ■

—Anu Prabhakar

Narrating audiobooks, says **RAHUL BOSE**, might not be very lucrative, but is very satisfying

INTERVIEW

Making His Voice Heard

*Actor **Rahul Bose** has lent his distinctive voice to several acclaimed dramatisations of stories—like the BBC's adaptations of Vikram Seth's* A Suitable Boy *and Satyajit Ray's* The Golden Fortress *and* The Mystery of the Elephant God *where he played the iconic detective Feluda. More recently, he has narrated audiobooks for Storytel. Edited excerpts from an interview:*

Q What drew you to audiobooks?
With online platforms like Storytel, listening to stories has become much more convenient than before when you had to buy cassettes... I have done radio plays since I was around 10. My first one, I remember, was the story of Krishna and I played him. It was commissioned by Amar Chitra Katha and made into a vinyl record—in those days, people would buy and play these records for their children.

Q. Do you listen to audiobooks a lot?
A lot. I start my day with an audiobook. On some days, when I go for a long walk for about three to four hours, I listen to one. When you can't sit down in one place and read but you want your mind to be stimulated, an audiobook is perfect as long as the voice does not irritate.

Q. Heard anything recently that you liked?
Right now, I am listening to Stephen Fry's *Mythos*. I have listened to Priyanka Chopra's memoir (narrated by her), and at least 20 P.G. Wodehouse books read by Jonathan Cecil and Nick Martin. I have also heard the whole *Sherlock Holmes* collection done by the BBC.

Q. Are you drawn to certain genres as a narrator?
No, it just has to be well written. There should be something in it for me and I should be convinced that I can do a good job. For instance, what attracted me to *The Strange Death of Anindyasundar* (on Storytel) was that it was sharp and funny. It was one of the most enjoyable experiences of my life.

Q. Are you currently recording any audiobooks?
No, but I would love to. Although it's not very lucrative, it's very satisfying. ■

—with Anu Prabhakar

PLAYLIST

THE TALKING LIBRARY

Celebrity audiobooks to get you listening

storytel original
Toba Tek Singh
SAADAT HASAN MANTO
WITH ANUPAM KHER

TOBA TEK SINGH
by Saadat Hassan Manto
Storytel
***Length: 19** minutes*

Few Partition stories are as iconic as 'Toba Tek Singh', but when heard in the voice of Anupam Kher, this story of Bishan Singh, an inmate sent from a Pakistani asylum to an Indian one, seems newly harrowing

Foreword by Shabana Azmi
DIVYA DUTTA
Read by the author
Me & Ma

ME AND MA *by Divya Dutta*
Penguin Random House (available on Audible & Google Play)
***Length: 3** hrs, **1** min*

Hearing the National Award-winner Divya Dutta read her memoir, one is first struck by her candour. She delves into her ups and downs and how through it all her mother remained a steady source of support.

audible ORIGINAL
THE LAST GIRL TO FALL IN LOVE
RASIKA DUGAL
PRATEIK BABBAR
DURJOY DATTA
ONLY FROM audible

THE LAST GIRL TO FALL IN LOVE
by Durjoy Datta
Audible
***Length: 6** hrs and **42** mins*

Rasika Duggal and Prateik Babbar narrate the story of a new world where women call the shots. As a murder mystery unravels, however, their characters are caught in a web of suspense and delusion.

Q+A

IN THE GROOVE

As Udyan Sagar a.k.a. **Nucleya** releases singles from *Baaraat*, an album that has resulted from a "give-and-take collaboration" with Ritviz, the musician talks about how his trademark electronic sound has progressed

Q. First 'Laung Gawacha' with Avneet Khurmi, then 'Jadi Buti' with Major Lazer, and now *Baaraat* with Ritviz. Hasn't your music always been collaborative?
Collaborators have been a huge part of my journey. As a musician, I'm extremely inspired by people, experiences and places. I have been lucky to have worked with some incredible musicians. The only difference with *Baaraat* is that Ritviz and I have undertaken a longer journey together, since it's an entire album. It has been a beautiful experience.

Q. Your music has always been very easy to dance to. Did the pandemic make you feel you would have to revise your sound?
I don't think this was linked to the pandemic at all. I'm inspired by things that happen around me, as well as the phases of my life I'm in. I would still like to believe that my music is easy to dance to, but I have made music with slightly different sounds in this period, which feels like a natural progression. I want to challenge myself, to create new sounds for my audiences.

Q. Music has never been easier to access. This benefits listeners but does it also change the game for artistes like yourself?
Definitely! I remember when streaming first entered the picture—from then to now, you can see how it has changed the game. Music distribution has become so easy, as has identifying and building fan bases, which is a huge benefit. Also, support for independent music, especially on apps like Spotify and Apple Music, has really boosted the scene.

Q. You're obviously a fan of *Money Heist*. You recently created 'Jaldi Aao', a fan anthem for the show. What else have you been streaming?
I'm actually a big fan of documentaries and *Seaspiracy* was a favourite in the family. Other than that, *Dave*, *Fatherhood*, *Scam 1992*, *Succession* have all been a part of my recent watchlist.

—with Shreevatsa Nevatia

INDIA TODAY

BREAKING NEWS

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PM Narendra Modi was speaking in Lok Sabha

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